CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN AND THE ETHICS OF THE GROTESQUE

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of English

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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By

William Douglas Joachim

May, 2015

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ABSTRACT

This work focuses on tracing the animating ethos of Charles Brockden Brown's intriguing but confusing novels through close attention to the texts and to the richly complex historical environment from which they emerge and to which they respond. In several non-novelistic writings, including prefaces, letters, essays, and reviews, Brown insists that the value of narratives, whether fictional or historical, lies in their effects in the realm of the ethical; it "lies without doubt in their moral tendency." But Brown's narratives go beyond inculcating a moral system; indeed, as I aim to show in my analyses of the novels *Wieland* and *Ormond*, each marked by Gothic sensationalism and psychological realism, Brown's narratives function to challenge the ethics of ethics, to subject ideas to reality-grounded counterfactual scenarios so as to expose the humanity and justice or lack thereof of moral systems. Brown's relentless skepticism coupled with his deep-seated concern for moral responsibility, I argue, speaks to problematic formal features of the narratives as well. That is, I want to argue that the novels' resistance to a totalizing explanatory construct serves to prompt a mode of continuous critical engagement, a living practice of attentive reading that is, when transposed into the realm of interpersonal relations, the active awareness and ethical regarding of the other in its true otherness. As such, the novels' very weirdness—their inconclusiveness, incongruity, and contradictions, in content and form; that which I suggest is best understood as their grotesqueness; that which commands attention and resists assimilation—serves an ethical end.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my lovely wife Celina and our wonderful children Rosie and Diego.

Chapter 1: An Introduction

When Charles Brockden Brown's first novel *Wieland; or, The Transformation: An American Tale* was published in New York City on September 14, 1798, the proprietor of Hocquet Caritat's Circulating Library, Bookshop, and Reading Rooms would have given the work pride of place.[1] M. Caritat was, after all, the novel's publisher.[2] He was also, not coincidentally, the creator of the largest, most diverse bookstore and library in the young United States. Both endeavors were driven by the same motivation. An émigré from Revolutionary France, Caritat was striving to spread the revolutionaries' principles through nurturing a republic of the intellect, a collectivity of minds meeting and relating through the medium of the printed word. It was a clear vision that he pursued with a principled dedication and a pragmatic decisiveness. He would later secure the rights to Brown's next novel *Ormond; or, The Secret Witness* (1799) even before *Wieland*'s profitability had been ascertained. And through his influence in the book trade, he would help insure the publication of the rest of Brown's novels, including *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (part 1 [1799], part 2 [1800]) and *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799). These efforts in the promotion of Gothic novels, stories of spontaneous combustion, female warriors, Illuminati plotters, and somnambulistic Indian-fighters, may seem disconnected from his lofty Enlightenment goals. Moreover, in the intervening years since their appearance on the shelves, Brown's novels have gathered to themselves a reputation for being, in a word, odd. They are works that provoke contrary readings and reactions among readers and within them, just as they portray in meticulous detail the shaky perceptions and startling reactions of severely conflicted characters. They are works that invite and resist

comparison, even as they take as one of their themes the problematic of resemblance and otherness. But they are works that spark dialogue. As such, they are right in line with Caritat's project. And for twenty-first century readers, separated by over two hundred years from the heady and tempestuous 1790s, peering into Caritat's establishment, with its flow of people, languages, ideas, and print commodities, may offer a useful glimpse of the creative-intellectual and political-economic context from which Brown's novels emerge and—importantly—to which they respond.

Opening his doors in the spring of 1797, the resourceful Caritat quickly established himself as an influential figure in the business of books with an ecumenical approach to the young nation's diverse reading habits: he catered to all tastes.[3] In his published catalogue, he assures prospective buyers and subscribers that his stock will be kept "upon an increasing Plan, [. . .] so that there may be a probability that most of the Books wanted by the inhabitants of this Country will be found in H. Caritat's Collections" (216). To make good on this promise he regularly sent to London for the latest and most popular titles, occasionally traveling there himself and returning in a ship weighted down with his acquisitions. A great many of these imported goods were novels in the Gothic mode, the specialty of London's infamous and immensely successful Minerva Press, for which Caritat was an authorized distributor in the U. S. Despite the moans of critics and moralists, the fans of dark adventure and ghoulish frights on both sides of the Atlantic consumed en masse the lurid wares of William Lane's publishing house, which is now best remembered for producing six of the seven Northanger Horrid Novels, the Gothic must-reads recommended to the impressionable heroine of Jane Austen's parodic *Northanger Abbey* (written1803, published 1818).[4] Caritat was far

from negligent in his attentions to this lucrative market and to its predominantly female readership. As one contemporary put it:

> His talents were not meanly cultivated by letters; he could tell a good book from a bad one, which few modern librarians can do. But *place aux dames* was his maxim, and all the ladies of New-York declared that the library of Mr. Caritat was charming. Its shelves could scarcely sustain the weight of *Female Frailty*, the *Posthumous Daughter*, and the *Cavern of Woe*; they required the aid of the carpenter to support the burden of the *Cottage-on-the-Moor*, the *House of Tynian*, and the *Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*; or they groaned under the multiplied editions of the *Devil in Love*, *More Ghosts*, and *Rinaldo Rinaldini*. Novels were called for by the young and the old; from the tender virgin of thirteen, whose little heart went pit-a-pat at the approach of a beau; to the experienced matron of three score, who could not read without spectacles. (John Davis 186-7)[5]

This admiring yet gently mocking sketch appears in the travel narrative of Englishman John Davis, an aspiring young writer who, like Brown, found in Caritat a publisher, and a shrewd one at that, a pioneer in the new business of letters. Davis records that when he approached Caritat for career advice, the canny businessman forthrightly told him, "I should be happy to serve you, but I have not the hypocrisy to pretend that my offers of service are disinterested: interest blends itself with all human actions, and you, sir, have it in your power to be useful to me" (19-20). He soon afterward undertook the distribution of Davis's *The Original Letters of the Unfortunate Lovers, Ferdinand and Elisabeth* (1798), a transcription of the intimate correspondence between the star-crossed couple at

the center of a sensational Manhattan murder-suicide case from the winter before. Of the book tradesman, Davis declares, "Few men knew better how to gratify present curiosity" (26).

"The Feast of Reason and the Flow of the Soul"

Caritat's dealing in such fare carried the potential to offend some self-appointed critics of popular taste. The final decade of the eighteenth century saw increased attention to and anxiety over the politics of print culture. With the expansion of production, the greater quantity and diversity of publishers and authors, and the more wide-spread availability of printed materials through circulating libraries and cheaper books (courtesy of technological improvements), commentators engaged in a culture war that pitted elitist Federalists against populist Jeffersonians. In this often heated discourse about the proper function of literature in the early American republic, Federalists voiced resistance to the democratization of print culture, which promoted the production and consumption of literary diversions rather than works of more practical value. As Matthew Pethers explains, these advocates of civic humanism argued that literature should have the serious social function "to guide the self-interested masses toward a synoptic understanding of the universe" (584). But even useful books were produced at a volume that alarmed some. The increased specialization enabled by and in a sense made necessary by the profusion of informative works contravened the republican ideal of assimilating all knowledge into a useful, comprehensive system for the benefit and advancement of the nation as a civic body. In contrast, the Jeffersonians held that the freedom to follow one's interests meant all should have access to the print culture, as producers and consumers, even if that results in a messy proliferation that thwarts the

civic ideal of attaining a practical omniscience. The Jeffersonians generally favored the Smithian idea of "the benefits of rational self-interest" and saw in the democratization of print culture the proto-Romantic ideal of imaginative literature serving to express personal identity and spiritual insight (587). As an author of fiction and later as editor of a literary magazine, Brown of course was not untouched by this controversy. Striking a defensive posture in a number of writings, including the essays "Novel-Reading" and "The Difference between History and Romance," he directly engages the opponents of imaginative literature. Caritat, too, wrote in favor of novel-reading, but remained on good terms with partisans on both sides in the culture war.

His success may have much to do with the fact that he did not deal solely in sensational works intended to warm hearts or to chill blood. A look at his 1799 catalogue evinces his ambition to not only serve the sentimental young girls and myopic grandmothers Davis caricaturizes but also to gain the patronage of the high-minded moralists, philosophers, and scientists, those who studied law, medicine, history, and politics. Although nearly half his listed offerings aimed at triggering readers' affective responses, drawing sighs and raising goose bumps, much of the rest sought to engage readers' rational faculties, holding out the promise of intellectual stimulation and moral elevation. But even works of amusement he presented in terms of their practical advantages, extolling their use as aids in acquiring a new language. Thus, for the thoughtful reader Caritat offered "approved books in English, French, Spanish, Greek, Latin, etc. in all arts and sciences," as the title of a later catalogue announced. The title of his first catalogue, *The Feast of Reason and the Flow of the Soul*, should serve to suggest that Davis's portrait of the popular Broadway bookshop gives us only a partial view. Just

beyond those shelves sagging under volumes of sensationalism and sentiment are other shelves shouldering the weighty arguments and philosophical inquiries of Locke, Montesquieu, Condorcet, Rousseau, and Reid; the socio-political subversions of Godwin, Paine, and Wollstonecraft; the medico-scientific texts of Erasmus Darwin, Boerhaave, Priestley, and Rush; the ideologically-charged historiographies of Burke and Volney; and many other works extolled in the "explanatory catalogue" for their utility, wit, taste, learnedness, and "correct language," including the biographies of statesmen, the treatises of clergymen, translations of classical texts, essays by various learned men and women, exotic travelogues, and the more widely-respected belletristic productions, such as those by Shakespeare, Addison, Pope, Johnson, and Goldsmith. Patrons could also find newspapers and journals, both domestic and foreign. As such, it is easy to see why, as one scholar puts it, "his rooms became a regular retreat and gathering place for New Yorkers of intellectual and literary bent" (Grabo "Historical Essay" 458).

One of those intellectual, literary New Yorkers was of course the Philadelphia native Charles Brockden Brown, who by the late summer of 1798 had spent a decade in desultory pursuit of a literary career. While still a teenager and an apprentice in a Philadelphia law office, Brown saw his work, including a series of Rousseauistic essays ("The Rhapsodist") and a poem on the death of Benjamin Franklin, published in newspapers. But after abandoning his law career in 1793, he spent the next five years starting and stopping several projects. A remarkably frenetic period of publication began when his first book *Alcuin,* a philosophical dialogue on the rights of women, appeared in the spring of 1798. Around this time he was contributing essays, literary reviews, short fiction, an excerpt of a now-lost novel, and nine chapters of what would become his third

novel *Arthur Mervyn* to Philadelphia's *Weekly Magazine*.[6] In July of that year Brown began an extended stay in New York, settling into the apartment of his friends William Johnson, a lawyer, and Elihu Hubbard Smith, a physician. It was Smith who soon after Brown's arrival brought the not-yet-complete manuscript of *Wieland* to Caritat.[7]

Given Caritat's ambition to serve those of all literary tastes, it is not surprising that the work of the relatively untried twenty-seven year old Brown would pique the interest of the canny salesman and dedicated idealist. In an advertisement for his lost novel, Brown had laid out a literary agenda that paralleled the republican hopes of Caritat. The author's aim, he declared, was to present to the public a work that would keep the attention of those who normally seek only amusement, "the idle and thoughtless," while also winning the homage of "those who study and reflect." He insisted that despite the perceived divide between popular and serious works "a contexture of facts capable of suspending the faculties of every soul in curiosity may be joined with depth of views into human nature and all the subtleties of reasoning" ("Notice" 202). The goal of reaching a diverse readership would have certainly resonated with Brown's future publisher. Brown's novel seemed to offer in one package just the sort of thing Caritat hoped his customers—all his customers—might appreciate. For those who longed for excessive passions and lurid thrills *Wieland* promised spontaneous combustion, a homicidal maniac, and a villainous ventriloquist, all folded into a story ripped from the headlines. And for readers of more "serious" fare, the novel exhibits a broad historical and geopolitical allusiveness and explores a number of issues that occupied the influential thinkers of the late Enlightenment, including the effects of environment on human behavior, the clashing epistemologies of rationalism and revealed

religion, the benefits and liabilities of self-determination, as well as the scientific and philosophical import of some intriguing, paradigm-challenging curiosities. Moreover, for American readers of all stripes who were eager to cultivate a national cultural identity, here was a home-made production set in an American locale and concerned with American (albeit colonial American) characters.

Despite whatever hopes Caritat may have had regarding the work and its function in a desired republic of intellect, Brown's novel elicited little notice from book buyers and, at best, a mixed reaction among critics. All indications are that sales of the novel were poor; there would be no second printing of *Wieland* in Brown's lifetime. Of the handful of reviews, a few were mostly positive, several were decidedly less so. Appreciation would come years later, among British literary lights Percy Shelley, John Keats, William Godwin (returning Brown's), and Mary Shelley, whose *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* exhibit Brown's influence. American authors James Fenimore Cooper, John Neal, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, John Greenleaf Whittier, and George Lippard would cite Brown as an important literary progenitor. But even among these, Brown's accomplishment seemed to lie in his works' exertion of a certain shadowy power rather than in their beauty. It was, in a way that appealed to the subversive sensibilities of the dark Romantics, a power not to entertain and enlighten but to possess and unsettle. And yet in the narrative of American literary history, developing in the writings of such commentators as Fuller, Poe, and the Duyckinck brothers, Brown remained a cipher. Although he is the only American author placed in Hawthorne's imagined Hall of Fantasy, his bust lay off by itself in "an obscure and shadowy niche" (735).

When juxtaposed with the other books and periodicals on the shelves at Caritat's library, Brown's works show most fully their simultaneous likeness to and difference from a number of antecedents. With their mélange of bizarre and terrifying events, emotional intensities, and explicit engagements with socio-political and philosophical issues, *Wieland* and its three immediate successors were like no other novels written on this side of the Atlantic before Brown.[8] But any number of Caritat's patrons, upon perusing these, his major novels, would have found something instantly familiar if also off-putting in the books' pages nonetheless. Brown built his complex narratives by drawing from a variety of source materials, both popular and elite literatures, both factual and fictive. In the case of *Wieland*, the horrific crime and the two "extraordinary and rare" incidents that are his first novel's most memorable features are, as Brown points out in footnotes, founded in fact. From a newspaper item Brown took the shocking, bloody deeds committed by his title character. The strange and mysterious death of Wieland's father is modeled on one reported in "one of the Journals of Florence" and reprinted in a Philadelphia newspaper. And the prodigious power attributed to the enigmatic Carwin resembles the subject of the Abbé de la Chapelle's *Le Ventriloque, ou l'engastimythe* (*The Ventriloquist; or, The Belly-talker* [1772]), which is referenced in the entry for ventriloquism in an American reprint of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.[9] But even for those unfamiliar with these sources, there was of course a more obvious lineage. As works of imaginative literature *Wieland* and the other major novels exhibit, at least at first blush, those conventional formal and affective properties most commonly associated with the sensationalist fiction of the era. In their mystery, terrifying suspense, and flashes of horror, Brown's novels are recognizably part of the well-established European literary

phenomenon the Gothic, whose popularity was reaching a crescendo with the recent publications of Ann Radcliffe's bestsellers *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) and Matthew G. Lewis's *succès de scandale The Monk* (1796). Undoubtedly, Brown's major fictions and these imports share some common generic elements. Each puts forth convoluted and disjointed narratives involving the supernatural or the semblance of the supernatural in a seeming breakdown of common sense reality; each features a libidinous villain terrorizing virtuous victims; and each uses picturesque locales and ominous interior spaces to emotive and thematic purpose. Given, however, the diverse uses to which such narrative elements were being put, it is not sufficient to simply assert that Brown transplanted the Gothic novel to American soil. Readers then, as now, well knew that dark melodramas came in different shades.

Gothic fiction, although arguably the most recognizable and enduring of formulaic genres, was not monolithic, one-dimensional, or limited to one class of reader, even in its early stages. Before the century was out, the literary craze that officially began in England with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) had proved itself quite adaptable, as seen by the development of literary sub-genres that drew from and expanded upon Walpole's original formula. *Otranto*'s medieval tale of supernatural events, dynastic curses, demonic villains, and threats of murder, rape, and incest established a set of conventional plot points, stock characters, and gloomy and claustrophobic settings that survived censure, parody, and poor execution to transform the literary marketplace. Walpole's stated aim to blend fantastical medieval romance with the realism of the modern novel was inspired, he claims, by a dream; and his work, in turn, inspired the creation of many nightmarish novels and tales that offered the

vicarious thrill of witnessing recognizably natural human reactions to seemingly unnatural events.[10] But by the late 1780s, the Gothic no longer served only as escapist entertainment—if indeed it ever did. Scholars have argued that the Gothic, even at its most absurd, did more than produce a jolt of pleasurable fear; it functioned to express and to shape a worldview.[11] To explain the rise and endurance of this dark side of the Enlightenment, these scholars have defined the early Gothic as a corollary to the eighteenth century's emerging secular faith in reason, as a manifestation of the aesthetic of the sublime, and as a reflection of and response to middle class insecurities concerning its fledgling autonomy.

In some views, the genre operated as a dramatic rendering of the historical progress of the human mind from the dark ages to enlightenment, from subjugation to sovereignty. Particularly in its Radcliffean form, distinguished by its "explained supernaturalism," the Gothic could take the form of a *bildungsroman* that traces the overly-sensitive heroine's path from naivety and superstition to enlightened emotional maturity and right reason. These tales of virtuous victims facing down terror offered a picture of the reader as right thinking, right feeling, and superior to the forces that would oppose her self-actualization, a sublime affirmation. In socio-political terms, critics have argued, the early Gothic manifested a desire to define the modern worldview and the modern subject against the residual influence of the allegedly backward and corrupt Middle Ages. Through entertaining narratives, Gothic novels tracked the inevitable victory of the rational, autonomous individual over the oppressive paternalism of traditional kinship structures, of feudalistic states, and of a hierarchical church that awed and brutalized the submissive masses. Chris Baldick explains, "The literary Gothic is

really anti-Gothic. At the foundation of Gothic literature's anti-Gothic sentiment lies this nightmare [among the British and Anglo-Irish middle class] of being dragged back to the persecutions of the Counter-Reformation" (xvi).[12]

"To Expose Error and Vice"

Building on this rather covert even unconscious cultural work of the early Gothic novels were the more overtly socio-politically purposeful Gothic novels written in Britain and the German states. The narrative structures developed by Walpole and Radcliffe and their many imitators presented to some reform-minded activists a ready-made template that with a few substitutions could easily serve as a critique of analogously cruel, barbarous, and irrational authoritarianism closer to home. Caritat's catalogue credits one particular author for having "judiciously taken advantage of the taste in Great Britain for Novels to expose error and vice" (134). That author, William Godwin, as well as other British radical democrats, including Robert Bage, Thomas Holcroft, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Charlotte Turner Smith, all of whom were inspired by the French Revolution, aimed to advance a reformist agenda by weaving a message of social progressivism and political radicalism into popular literary forms. Through tales of intrigue, suspense, romance, and adventure these English Jacobins, as they came to be called, hoped to appeal to the usually apolitical and non-intellectual lower classes.[13] The individualist (proto-anarchist) philosophy and literary theory of this group, expressly articulated in Godwin's *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), made an immense impression on freethinkers in Europe and America, including Brown, whose *Arthur Mervyn* shares narrative details with Godwin's own Gothic novel *Things As They*

Are; or, The Adventure of Caleb Williams (1794) and whose deep interest in gender issues is evinced not only in *Alcuin* but in his novelistic works as well.[14] Interestingly, the Jacobin formula proved so successful, at least in the first half of the decade, that it provoked an alarmed reaction from British conservatives, who then penned (without a discernible hint of irony) equally sensational Anti-Jacobin novels in an effort to discredit the manipulation of the masses through popular culture.[15]

Godwin and his circle have long been recognized influences on Brown's writing; but *Wieland* and some of his other fictions also show the influence of German writers who were producing their own politically-charged subset of imaginative literature. In plays, ballads, and *schaeuerroman* ("shudder" or horror novels), these writers employed elements of the fantastical, the macabre, and the terrifying to advance Enlightenment reform ideals. Well-known to young American intellectuals, and of course available at Caritat's library, were such works as Friedrich Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (1786-89) and Cajetan Tschink's *The Victim of Magical Delusion* (1795) as well as Ludwig Tieck's *William Lovell* (1795) and C. M. Wieland's *Peregrinus Proteus* (1791). Scholars Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro refer to these works as "State Romances that combine Gothic themes with anxieties about clandestine networks seeking to overthrow a weak state."[16] Brown's first published novel not only takes its title from poet Christoph Martin Wieland, whose *Der geprufte Abraham* (1764) is a verse treatment of the biblical story echoed in *Wieland*, but also uses Gottfried Bürger's "Lenore" as the model for the ballad upon which his heroine ruminates at a critical juncture in her story.[17] Brown borrows certain thematic elements from the Germans, as well, particularly the focus on debunking superstition, exposing subversive intents behind false displays of supernatural powers,

and unveiling the machinations of underground revolutionary organizations. Moreover, *Wieland*'s Carwin and *Ormond*'s title character, both men with shady pasts, rare skills, and unclear motives, as striking as they are, are not unlike the chameleon-like outsiders in Schiller's and Tschink's works, which were being read and discussed by Brown and his friends as he labored on what would become his first novels.[18]

But not in imaginative works alone did Brown find mystery and horror being conjured for political purposes. Writers in the Age of Revolution addressing the violent, disillusioning uncertainties of the Western world as it neared the end of the eighteenth century expressed their alarm and confusion through Gothic tropes. Gothic tones sound in Edmund Burke's polemical *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1791), particularly in its depiction of a half-dressed Marie Antoinette fleeing her Versailles boudoir just as it is invaded by the merciless, marauding revolutionaries.[19] And it was Burke, in his seminal essay on aesthetics *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), who recognized the political utility of eliciting in the public an invigorating even agreeable fear, a sense of awe before great, obscure power. Brown's fellow-Philadelphian Dr. Benjamin Rush was an early proponent of deploying Gothic mystery and terror as tools for social control. In a 1787 essay "An Inquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals, and Upon Society," the eminent physician argues that he could not "conceive anything more calculated to diffuse terror through a community, and thereby to prevent crimes, than [the consequences of establishing his proposed reform institution]." "Children," he writes, "will press upon the evening fire in listening to the tales that will be spread from this abode of misery. Superstition will add to its horrors: and romance will find in it ample materials for fiction,

which cannot fail of increasing the terror of its punishments" (qtd. in Shuffleton 94). In the era before the fragmentation of intellectual inquiry into specialized and professionalized disciplines, the good doctor's remarks exemplify the then-common understanding that seemingly separate fields of knowledge, including medicine, science, politics, education, and art, were not the purview of isolated experts, but were interconnected and generally accessible aspects of public discourse. Similarly, Burke's philosophical discussion of the sublime famously exerted a direct influence on the literary practice of Gothic mistress Ann Radcliffe, while his focus on the persuasiveness of writing that evokes strong feelings, especially fear, also set the stage for the paranoid style of politics soon to come.

In the late 1790s, mystery, horror, persecution, perversion, and rape were stock elements of the counter-revolutionary narratives that were stoking hysteria among conservatives in England and the United States. Participants in the strident anti-Illuminati campaign trafficked in supposedly true, decidedly Gothic tales of a group of conspiratorial radicals perched to overthrow all governments and eradicate all religion. Employing rhetoric that mimicked the storylines of popular melodramatic literature, Congregationalist ministers like Jedidiah Morse and Timothy Dwight, president of Yale, "projected their fears about the vulnerability of the youthful American republic onto an emblematic chaste maiden surrounded by plotting seducers who would stop at nothing to corrupt her sacred virtue" (Levine 21).[20] The Illuminati scare was reaching its height in the summer of 1798 just as Brown was working on both *Arthur Mervyn* and *Wieland*. It undoubtedly informed the characterization of the secretive, vaguely foreign, would-be seducer Carwin.[21] And *Arthur Mervyn*'s depiction of socio-political and moral vitiation

in the face of a yellow fever epidemic, which was popularly linked with the arrival of French émigrés fleeing Revolutionary France and slave rebellions in Haiti, would surely have tapped into fears of foreign contagion, both of the body and the body politic. Later that year Brown would also complete *Ormond*, whose title character is an avowed member of an Illuminati-like group.

But the novels' connection to the narrative conventions and to the politics of their Gothic influences, fictive and factual, is murky. At least as early as the first twentieth century revival of critical interest in Brown (with the publication of new editions of *Wieland* edited by Fred Lewis Pattee, *Ormond* edited by Ernst Marchand, and *Edgar Huntly* edited by David L. Clark in the 1920s and 30s) scholars have been objecting to the term *Gothic* as too limited to describe the novels' various literary borrowings, intellectual pedigree, and moralizing aims. Wil Verhoeven repeats this sentiment in arguing that one should approach Brown's fiction as "'philosophical histories' (the term 'Gothic novels' clearly being inadequate)" (32). Moreover, as the term *Gothic* has become more inclusive, some contend that the label is simply too inclusive to be very useful in getting a clear understanding of Brown's literary strategies and philosophical concerns. Donald A. Ringe cautions that "though subsequent writers in England, Germany, and the United States freely employed [Gothic] devices, they enlisted them in the service of widely divergent systems of thought and created a series of transmutations that must be retraced if we are to understand its later use" (*American Gothic* 18). Teresa Goddu, however, uses Brown's work in her argument for the resurrection of the Gothic as a useful literary term in American literary studies once the formal and affective

dissonances endemic to the genre are recognized as subversions of the dominant narratives of national identity.[22]

The debate over the definition and socio-political valence of the Gothic notwithstanding, Brown's first four novels and several of his short stories are acknowledged as much-indebted to the Gothic even as the nature of that debt remains problematic. Goddu points out that "Brown's critical reputation remains grounded in the gothic; his name more than any other author's (with the exception of Poe) signifies the gothic in American literature" (51). But in his preface to *Edgar Huntly*, Brown famously exclaims against the "puerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras" of popular sensationalist literature of the time (3). Accordingly, unlike nearly all previous Gothic fictions, Brown's novels are not set in the haunted ruins or monastic dungeons of old Europe. His novels' mysteries and horrors play out in what was at the time of composition the recent past and for the most part on American soil. *Wieland*'s story unfolds at the picturesque Mettingen, an idyllic farm of ordered orchards and natural grandeur overlooking the Schuylkill River, dotted with a main house, a hilltop gazebo, and a second dwelling for the uncommonly independent Clara. *Ormond* and *Arthur Mervyn*, Brown's next novels, follow events in the city of Philadelphia, a modern port of international trade and immigration. The eponymous Edgar Huntly seeks answers in the wilds of Norwalk, an area of Indian and settler hostilities just beyond the frontier farmlands of north-eastern Pennsylvania. And although they are like Radcliffe's novels in eschewing supernaturalism and decrying gullibility and superstition, *Wieland* and its successors could not be construed as conventional Enlightenment narratives tracing the education of their young protagonists. Following Clara Wieland's trajectory, for

example, one sees she moves from the smug enjoyment of Enlightenment aesthetic-intellectual complacency; through moments of terror and confusion; and finally to an unconvincing and even ominous re-establishment of right reason. Although all Brown's novels are distinct in their respective thematic emphases, the ending of each leaves the principle character's psychological and moral well-being a matter of doubt.

Equally problematic is the way in which Brown's fiction engages the politics of Gothic narratives, including the Godwinian and German forms, in nuanced, often critical ways. Scholars relying on close reading and historical and biographical material to expose partisan motivations in Brown's engagement with contemporary issues, especially prevalent in criticism of the 1980s and 90s, established opposing camps and a critical impasse, effectively proving only that Brown's works are "susceptible to multiple, even contradictory readings" (Waterman "Revised" 182). Robert S. Levine rightly asserts that "to reduce his writings to a series of political statements, would finally only crudely distort his literary intentions and methods" (*Conspiracy* 25). Recent critics have sought to understand Brown's writings by widening the scope from the relatively narrow confines of national identity and party politics to the larger circum-Atlantic world of geopolitics, economics, ideas, and art. Going beyond the broadly conceived binaries of early republic partisanship, these critics have set out to find or invent language to more accurately describe the opposing impulses in Brown's writings.

It is precisely the disorienting dissimilarities, the vexed relation to narrative conventions and contemporary philosophies that seem to speak to modern readers. Where yesterday's critics once saw flawed beauties, today's scholars now more often see functional complexities. Along with the emergence of new approaches to literary studies,

the past few decades have seen a great shift in Brown's reputation from a historical curiosity to the matrix through which the early republic and its wider context can be fully engaged. Taken together the efforts of historians and literary scholars have provided an ever richer contextualization, have brought to light points of reference and models for comparison, and demonstrated the astoundingly multivalent character of his writings. In the manner of new historicism, scholars of Brown's writings have usefully drawn connections to and analogies from the areas of law, education, economics, art, architecture, historiography, and political theory.[23] They have, in effect, put his work into meaningful dialogue with nearly every item in Caritat's collection. Unprecedented attention has turned to not only Brown's major novels but to his entire corpus, including other novelistic works, literary criticism, essays, poems, political pamphlets, letters, and short fiction, in an effort to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the early republic's cultural milieu. However, these texts are more than interesting relics that pique the curiosity of antiquarians. For anyone interested in the problems plaguing the twenty-first century, Brown's novels—engaging as they do issues of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, gender and sexuality, faith and reason, narrative and authority, among others—possess a strong and strange allure. But this should not be surprising. Charles Brockden Brown was a well-informed, intellectually engaged writer feverishly composing during a moment of great crisis in modernity. In richly realized stories he took on the task of registering and responding to the shocks of a transitional period, a period out of which developed the paradigms that governed the Western world for the better part of the last two hundred years. The postmodern strain prevalent in current Brown scholarship, which puts Brown into dialogue with highly sophisticated twentieth-

century and contemporary thinkers, is the justifiable recognition of a shared interest in interrogating the Enlightenment project. The only consensus to emerge from all the discussion of Brown's writings is that Brown's writings, as gateways to the past and commentaries on the present, are eminently worth discussing.[24] More than two centuries on, the writings of Charles Brockden Brown continue to surprise, unsettle, and intrigue.

What follows in this paper is my own response to the novels and related works of Charles Brockden Brown. It is a response informed by and in debt to the responses of many others, even as it aims to articulate and build upon the gut reaction I felt in my initial more or less naïve encounter with what continue to be for me endlessly fascinating works. I proceed from the sense that the troublesome elements of these texts, that which make them appear incongruous, contradictory, and inconclusive, are in most if not all instances functional elements of his artistic-intellectual project and indeed are consistent with a certain philosophical orientation. Rather than focus on trying to settle just where Brown comes down on a particular issue, regarding for example the proper form and function of government, the place of art in society, the relation of the sexes, classes, or races, or the existence and attributes of the divine, I am instead attempting to trace the contours of the animating ethos and investigative methodology moving within these texts.

"A Banquet of Horrors"

> Instead of hesitating before a scruple, and aspiring to avoid a fault, he braved criticism, and aimed only at effect. He was an inventor, but without materials. His strength and his efforts are convulsive throes—his works are a banquet of horrors. The hint of some of them is taken from *Caleb Williams* and *St Leon*, but infinitely exaggerated, and carried to

> disgust and outrage. They are full (to disease) of imagination,—but it is forced, violent, and shocking. This is to be expected, we apprehend, in attempts of this kind and in a country like America, where there is, generally speaking, no *natural imagination*. The mind must be excited by overstraining, by pulleys and levers. Mr. Brown was a man of genius, of strong passion, and active fancy; but his genius was not seconded by early habit, or by surrounding sympathy. His story and his interests are not wrought out, therefore, in the ordinary course of nature; but are, like the monster in Frankenstein, a man made by art and determined by will.[25]

William Hazlitt's words convey a vivid picture of Brown's work as a sort of conceptual and affective assault: "forced, violent, and shocking." Products of a diseased imagination, they are unnatural exaggerations that evoke disgust and outrage. Like Frankenstein's monster, they are works of audacity, passion, and genius. In all but the term itself, Hazlitt's reaction to Brown's work conjures up the concept of the grotesque. While not taking up Hazlitt's analysis of Brown's intentions, capacities, and circumstances, I will try in this chapter to show that this concept, the grotesque, shadowed forth in the visceral reaction of this critic, can serve as a useful starting point for tracing the philosophical orientation of Brown's writings.

Others have recognized the term grotesque as an adjective well-suited to describe Brown's weird works. Fred Lewis Pattee, Brown's first twentieth-century editor, describes the novelist's prose style as "over-ornate and inflated, grotesque with circumlocutions," while the mid-century psychoanalytical critic Leslie Fiedler sees Brown's novels as engagements with "the exaggerated and the grotesque" deep within.[26]

Jane Tompkins, writing in the 1980s, takes a historicist approach to provide a "background against which Brown's grotesque narrative [*Wieland*] begins to make sense" (47). Each usage of the term, though only fleeting, registers the general strangeness of signifying structures whose meanings are obscured. Each also registers the particular valences of the grotesque within culturally- and historically-situated critical discourses: in these cases, formalism, psychological archetypes, and new historicism.[27] The critical response to Brown's work thus illustrates one aspect of the grotesque as it is discussed by modern theorists: that is, beyond the most general definition, denoting what Virginia E. Swain calls the "eternal" or "unchanging" grotesque, the meaning of the grotesque in the larger sense of its place and function in the world changes with the cultural-historical context (3).

Makers of modern art and literature of the past one hundred years or so, from the avant-garde to camp, express a general fascination with the grotesque. Just so, some modern scholars and philosophers, seeking insight into the complexities of art and of the modern world, have grappled with this protean concept. The past fifty years have seen several extended attempts at defining, categorizing, periodizing, and theorizing it. Of course, Brown, writing at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, at the turn toward modernity, did not have the conceptual structure or the terminology as it is deployed today. Nevertheless, the most prominent features of Brown's novels—the bizarre and astonishing events, the contradictory and unintelligible beings, the problematic prose, and the inconclusive and fragmentary narratives—are those that give rise to what Geoffrey Galt Harpham describes as that particular "species of confusion" signified by the word grotesque (xxi).

As understood in contemporary scholarship, the word *grotesque* refers to a peculiarly incongruous structural quality, one exhibited in both the formal properties of an object and in the cognitive, affective, and physiological reactions of the perceiving subject. In Philip Thomson's brief formulation, the grotesque is "the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response" (27). But if this structural quality seems relatively easy to understand, little else about the grotesque is so straightforward. Any comparison of the widely-differing visual or conceptual phenomena so described will show that no content is immanently grotesque.[28] African masks, the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, Italian street theater (commedia dell' arte), Damien Hirst's shark suspended in a tank of formaldehyde: Theorists attempting to capture what it is that seems to connect all these things called grotesque invoke a cluster of terms, including excess, abnormality, extravagance, disharmony, and absurdity.[29] Taking a taxonomical approach, some commentators speak of the grotesque's "major rhetorical and pictorial devices," formulated in some instances as caricature, inversion, and hybridity (Margaret Miles 96). The shared element of each is the violation of normative boundaries and definitions. As such, the grotesque signifies as a relation, a position relative to a standard. However, what is conceived as a grotesque violation of norms depends on the often unconscious and culturally- and historically-determined construction of what is normal, natural, or logical.

Toward an Understanding of the Grotesque

From the dark, grotto-like excavations of some ancient Roman ruins, the ornamental style subsequently referred to as *grottesche* emerged in the late fifteenth century and immediately inspired artists like Raphael and Udine, who covered the loggias

of the Vatican with satyrs, mermaids, and those other fantastical, combinatory creatures, half-human and half-animal, -plant, or -architectural feature, that they saw gamboling on the frescoed walls of Nero's Golden House (Domus Aurea). Clearly beautiful, these images are at the same time evocative of some other, hard to describe sensation—perhaps, the sense of the familiar yet alien. Since that time the grotesque has drawn praise and drawn fire from numerous commentators. It prompted critical analyses in the late eighteenth and again in the mid-nineteenth centuries. But the most useful treatments, for my purposes, are those by the major twentieth-century theorists of the grotesque: Wolfgang Kayser, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham.

After reviewing the etymology of the grotesque, and the history of attempts to define it, Kayser presents his rather grim analysis. For Kayser, the grotesque is the experience of the sudden estrangement of the world. He describes it as the transformation of familiar norms, "the abolition of the law of status, the loss of identity, the distortion of 'natural' sign and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order" that inspire the fear, not of death, but of life in such an alienated world. Kayser also offers a somewhat vague but intriguing contention that the grotesque arises from and points back to the bleak, impersonal realm of nonbeing, the "ghostly 'IT'" (185). Both of these premises resonate with the psychological drama I will trace in *Wieland* and with elements of the ethical philosophy I will explore later in this paper.

Building on Kayser's assertion that "the grotesque world is—and is not—our own world," Agata Krzychylkiewicz explains that in the grotesque work "the 'real' and the 'unreal,' [. . .] are forced by the artist to coexist [. . .] as an undivided entity, leading to

total confusion between reality and fiction." She observes that "the 'unreal' can be synonymous with [. . .] fantastic, invented, contrived, dreamlike, illusory, or fictitious. If used in the sense of 'untrue,' the 'unreal' means fake or fraudulent, implying a certain trickery and manipulation with reality—its deliberate deformation" (13). Krzychylkiewicz's discussion of the grotesque world brings to the fore ideas I pursue in the chapter on *Ormond*.

In *Rabelais and His World* (1936, 1964), Mikhail Bakhtin investigates the socio-political functions of the grotesque, focusing particularly on the medieval collapse or inversion of social norms in the tradition of carnival. Using Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, he examines grotesque realism and the grotesque body as marking the continuities among people in society and between people and the material world, a continuity that defies artificial social and political distinctions. Bakhtin's ideas speak to the mind-body philosophy that, I will argue, creates the conditions for the Wieland family's destruction.

Other scholars of the grotesque draw on Bakhtinian concepts to explore the link between the grotesque and issues of gender and sex. If there is a recurring grotesque content, Mary Russo observes, it is the deviant bodily form, the body being a more or less constant experience throughout human cultures. Not surprisingly, therefore, in patriarchal societies, the female body is not uncommonly the site of grotesqueness.[30] Russo and others, including Margaret Miles, have investigated the Western history of philosophical, theological, and cultural constructions of "woman" as the other, as a naturally grotesque being. Miles asserts, "The association of the female body with materiality, sex, and reproduction in the female body makes it an essential—not an

accidental—aspect of the grotesque" (90). Thus, not only does the grotesque symbolize the violation of taboos, the blurring of socio-political distinctions, but often it very specifically figures as the female body and those behaviors conventionally figured as female. These insights are particularly relevant to a consideration of Brown's *Ormond*, which prominently features non-normative females.

Geoffrey Galt Harpham, like the others, calls attention to the importance of the culturally- and historically-determined normative order, the accepted boundaries and categorical distinctions, as that against which the grotesque disruptively emerges. Additionally, he conceptualizes what he terms the "grotesque interval," or the gap between the initial confusion occasioned by the encounter with the grotesque and the moment ordered thought reasserts itself. This interval, he argues, is a space of possibility. From this space one may re-emerge having discounted the phenomena as an inferior instance of a type—having, in other words, assimilated it into the dualistic, categorical system of thought. Or one may re-emerge from this space having gained a new insight from beyond the confines of the normative system of thought. He compares this state of possibility to Thomas Kuhn's discussion of the paradigm shift, the sudden transformation in scientific thinking that occurs once the data unable to be assimilated by the reigning paradigm reaches a certain critical mass or tipping point. "It is one characteristic of revolutions, whether literary, political, or scientific," he writes, "that they liberate, dignify, and pass through the grotesque" (24). Harpham goes on to connect the grotesque to myth and to mythic consciousness, a "permanent potentiality of mind that is 'mostly suppressed, denied or compromised' in our own day yet is nevertheless, 'always vital'" (Adams and Yates 35). I want to suggest that each of these premises,

comparable to concepts in other discussions of the grotesque, finds their reflection in Brown's novels and, importantly, in discussions of the kind of ethical philosophy informing Brown's works.

The Grotesque in the Late Enlightenment

The grotesque, as scholars have argued, can be traced back to prehistoric cave paintings—at least the formal qualities we now associate with the term grotesque, for, of course, the affective responses sought by their creators and the reactions of their original viewers are not known.[31] Grotesqueness, once again, is historically-culturally relational; and therefore, as Harpham points out, we are often doubly alienated from the grotesque work of the past, alienated both from its context and from its particular alienation from that context. With this in mind, looking back upon the Age of Enlightenment should help us get a better understanding of the grotesqueness of Brown's work within the norms of his historical-cultural moment.

Perhaps this period, which may be dated from the late seventeenth century through the end of the eighteenth, seems an overly broad timespan for consideration. But Brown himself took the long view of history. In a letter to his friend Samuel Miller, then preparing a second volume of his *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, Brown shares his thoughts on the most important aspects of the past hundred years. Tellingly he writes not of specific events or prominent people but of the continuation of a centuries-long struggle for authority linking the shift from an emperor to a pope, then from a unified to a divided Christianity, and then from a universal religiosity to a contest over "the truth of any form of religion whatsoever" (*Letters* 611).[32] With his further remarks on the developments most likely to exert a lasting influence, including the greatly

increased commercial and territorial expansion of European powers, the explosion in printed materials, and the emergence of a wide-spread print culture, Brown's overview presents history as a continual state of flux, a dynamic process of increasing complexity, fragmentation, and interconnectedness.

It is not hard to see how, looking back from the end of the eighteenth century, Brown could have taken such a view. The manifold and multivalent circulations of the European-Atlantic world at that time belied the concrete reality of all manner of borders and boundaries. The 1790s saw the extreme expressions of those revolutions within all the major realms of human activity that are the defining characteristic of the Age of Enlightenment. In the chaotic last years of the century, it seemed to many that the Enlightenment world had devolved into division and delusion. This is the decade, not incidentally, that coined the terms *ideology* and *phantasmagoria*.[33] So how did it come to this?

Beginning in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, re-examinations of religious and socio-political doctrines as well as of the nature and function of literature and art emerged in tandem with developments in the scientific approach to understanding the physical universe. With new instruments, technologies, and mathematical constructs (such as the invention of calculus), natural philosophers challenged not only long-unquestioned teachings and abstract religious conceptions, but also, in some cases, refuted everyday perceptions. Scientific discoveries of the long eighteenth century revealed intriguing new wonders of an invisible world, wonders that coexisted with and were an integral part of the familiar, visible world.[34] Pioneering investigators posited the existence of material forces and gases that were imperceptible to the eye, demonstrated

the marvelous properties of electricity and magnetism, peered into the hidden workings of living tissue, and spied upon the secret life of microscopic creatures, all phenomena that eluded common experience or even ran counter to it.

Such developments had a profound influence on the way Westerners looked upon and explained the world. But the course of human understanding does not run smooth. It is tempting to conceive of the increase of scientific knowledge throughout the eighteenth century as a steady march toward an objective understanding of an increasingly predictable and comprehensible world. Scientific breakthroughs, however, did not necessarily lead to an era of universal consensus and clarity even among the most accomplished scientists. Brown, who maintained close ties with Quaker friends in Philadelphia and his deist friends in New York, well knew that science was not self-evidently superior to religious doctrine in the views of many living at the time, nor was it a world apart, impervious to human vice and error. For evidence of the fallibility of the seers into the workings of the natural world, Brown need look no further than his hometown and the fruitless bickering of Philadelphia's medical community over the prevention and treatment of the ruinous yellow fever.[35] References throughout his writings show that he was quite familiar with the many, often politically-charged conflicts over which system of order, which definitions, classifications, and explanatory theories would win out. Partisans of Carolus Linnaeus and of the Comte de Buffon took part in a bitter feud over which classificatory system for living things was best. Scientists and English government officials followed with great interest the controversy between Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Wilson regarding whether a lightning rod should have a sharp or a blunt tip. Chemists Joseph Priestley and Antoine Lavoisier disagreed over the

existence of an essence of combustion, while the field of physiology remained staunchly divided between mechanists and vitalists, that is, between those who viewed the body as a hydro-dynamic, electro-chemical system and those who held that living matter was infused with an animus or spirit of vitality.

Beyond these internecine disputes were controversial claims that blurred the line between those legitimate scientific views about which reasonable people could disagree and that which was pure unscientific hokum. In 1784, the French Royal Academy of Sciences set up a committee (which included Franklin) tasked with investigating Franz Anton Mesmer's claims about his animal magnetism cures. Even after the committee's finding that animal magnetism did not exist, a pamphlet war between his defenders and his opponents continued unabated.[36] Indeed, the surprising nature of the era's scientific discoveries lent a sheen of plausibility to a number of other rather incredible theories and wild assertions. In the 1790s, genuine scientific progress tied to testable hypotheses and reproducible results coexisted awkwardly with the dead weight of persistent fallacies, like phlogiston, aether, bodily humors, and electrical fluid. The waning of the century saw the rise of sensational pseudo-scientific marvels and now-discredited constructs like animal electricity and physiognomy that nevertheless enjoyed a thriving afterlife in popular culture. These latter, presented in the form of theatrical spectacles, parlor tricks, and quasi-scholarly monographs, played well to a growing and general fascination with scientific anomalies and curiosities. Indeed, something like a cottage industry of pop science emerged. Entrepreneurs in major cities like Philadelphia and New York lured ticket buyers with new-fangled optical devices, like solar microscopes, perspective boxes, and magic lanterns that presented startling, alienating views of the world.[37] Throughout

the century, new ideas about and investigations into the human mind produced serious materialist and metaphysical speculation as well as curious accounts of "the force of imagination" that fascinated popular and elite minds alike. The Toft Case of 1726, in which a woman claimed to have given birth to a litter of rabbits, spurred a quite public controversy among medical professionals regarding the susceptibility of the developing fetus to the mother's emotional state.[38] Late in the century, the continued popularity of the force of the imagination genre is evinced by the numerous sensational accounts of this phenomenon included in Erasmus Darwin's 1796 compendium of mental disease *Zoonomia*, the American edition of which Brown's friend Elihu Hubbard Smith ushered through the press. Science in the eighteenth century was a prolific generator of grotesquery.

Not to be outdone, the proponents of magic and spiritualism, which not only held out but thrived throughout and well after the Age of Reason, conjured their own grotesqueries. Whether seen as a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment or perhaps as an extension of it, the burgeoning Romantic interest in mystery and in the Middle Ages found expression not only in the popular Gothic fictions but also sometimes in more hands-on explorations of the occult. Such interest in mystery and the occult, one scholar explains, was driven by "a strong desire to reconcile the findings of modern science with a religious view that could restore man to a position of centrality and dignity in the universe" (Goodrick-Clark 29). The corpus of the mystical Hermes Trismegistus fascinated the pious Isaac Newton at the beginning of the Enlightenment. By the end of the eighteenth century, with the power and prestige of religion waning, it may be that some educated people intrigued by displays and tales of the seemingly supernatural

looked upon such phenomena with a certain half-serious, half-facetious wonder. Although freemasonry may be the most famous example of the era's adoption of the trappings if not necessarily the mystical substance of the occult, the blasphemous mockeries of the Hell-Fire Club may be the most infamous. In a former abbey, Sir Francis Dashwood, who is the probable namesake of a would-be seducer in Brown's *Wieland*, led his "monks" in bacchanals with "nuns" (prostitutes).[39] The occultist Count Cagliostro, a forger, counterfeiter, and dealer in artefacts and nostrums of magical power, cut a colorful swath through the courts and salons of Europe, gathering aristocratic devotees, and inspiring Gothic fictions by Goethe and Schiller, favorite authors of Brown and his circle.[40]

With the paradigm shifts of the long eighteenth century, the grotesque takes on a new significance in relation to human understanding and aspirations. The spiritual or theological meaningfulness of that which we might call the grotesque finds itself at odds with the emergent faith in reason. In the deeply religious thought of early American writers, the otherness exhibited by grotesque phenomena is believed to be the incursion of agents of the supernatural realm into the realm of man and nature. As exemplified in Cotton Mather's writings, wonders were signs of the invisible, spiritual world, a world separate from the natural laws that ordered the familiar realm of human experience. The otherwise inexplicable could be understood as demonstrations of the divine will or as the machinations of the devil. In short, bizarre and surprising phenomena could indicate the agency of angels or demons, the work of beings of a separate sphere of reality. This understanding of the workings of the world held great moral significance. In this view, personhood, or the subject, was understood as the site of the conflict between

otherworldly forces for influence. According to the traditional view, which was expressed in and shaped by narratives as well as argumentation, demonic agents offer the gratifications of material, bodily desires, graphically figured as grotesquery in the works of Mather, John Winthrop (the description of Ann Hutchinson's monstrous birth) and Michael Wigglesworth, while angelic agents work to inspire spiritual priorities.

But in the Age of Reason, beginning later in the seventeenth century, the otherness exhibited by what we call the grotesque gradually came to be viewed in terms of an anomaly in an otherwise knowable universe, something to be eventually explained in accordance with known principles and, where practicable, brought into line with them. The grotesque, in the new language of science and logic, transforms from the signs and wonders of a divine order, into an otherness relative to logical and moral constructs. Physical and pictorial wonders are termed anomalies, prodigies, or, as in Lord Kames's words, "remarkable deviations from the standard."[41] Over the course of this new era in the human approach to understanding the universe, the term *monster* loses its sense of warning or demonstration of God's will (the same Latin root lies in both *monster* and *demonstration*) and dispassionately denotes a grossly, radically abnormal physical specimen.[42] Thus, monstrosity transforms from a source of religious awe to an object of scientific curiosity where the normal, logical, and nominally natural is the basis of all reality, the default against which remarkable deviations serve to affirm the superiority of the known order. Further, the divide between two realms of existence was no longer something out there in any real sense; it was internalized such that the mind and the body (the knowing "I" and the material self) became the new, secular terms of the old moral dichotomy. In the view of some, reason became the new religion, the source of our

understanding of ourselves and our place in the universe, of the order and occasional disruptions of order, and the means by which humans attain moral understanding.[43]

These ideas about the nature of the physical world and of human understanding had tremendous political implications, as well, implications that became a new site for the grotesque. Agitators for reform posited or popularized radical ideas extrapolated from Newtonian and Lockean views of nature, the mind, and society. Some mounted direct challenges against the traditional power structures throughout society, rejecting feudal, aristocratic, monarchical, and religious claims of authority in favor of the principle of natural rights and the guidance of reason and a universal moral sense. Thus, while through much of the century imperial wars for colonies and commodities continued to keep cartographers busily updating the political map, the last third of the century engendered a new kind of warfare, an ideological warfare that kept political theorists, lawmakers, clergymen, and self-appointed spokespersons busily drawing and defending the lines between right and wrong, lawful and criminal, natural and adulterated.[44] Some of these contenders fought to preserve society from the corrupting effects of specious new doctrines, while others fought to purify society from the delusive and pernicious dogmas of antiquity.[45] Continental and British radical thinkers voiced variously the arguments that man is a machine, mind is material, religion is false, and civilization is bondage. But any monolithic constructions of the combatants in the contest of ideas elides the confounding complexity of the issues, the great number of contrasting viewpoints, and the mutability of superficially stable and unified concepts. *Innovation* and *tradition,* for example, were not the exclusive idols of one side or the other in the socio-political conflicts. Some reformists saw their cause in essentially conservative

terms, as a return to a truer form of government, either the English tradition of limited power or the ancient models of republican government; others fervently rejected the past in favor of visions of a new world order. The anti-revolutionaries too might embrace modern innovations but stop short of drastic changes, like those who championed enlightened absolutism, which was put into practice in Prussia and, for a time, Russia. Closer to home, the leaders of the American Revolution generally championed the kind of updated classical republicanism born of Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* and Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*. But in the 1780s and 1790s, divided over Jean Jacques Rousseau's conceptions of the social contract and by the French Revolution, the unity of the revolutionary generation broke down into bitter and vociferous division. Steeped in the conflicts, calamities, and controversies of his times and possessed of a voracious and inventive mind, Charles Brockden Brown could well be expected to have delved into the causes and consequences of such momentous happenings and to have critically engaged the proffered explanations, correctives, and countermeasures. Modern art's association with the grotesque can be linked to the philosophical disenchantment following the enormities that mark the twentieth century. Brown's grotesque narratives are a measure of and an answer to the enthusiasms and disillusionments of the late eighteenth century.

The nature of his engagement, however, has long been debated. Endeavoring to position him along a two-poled spectrum, a few critics have located Brown somewhere between neo-classicism and romanticism in his literary practice and judgments.[46] When it comes to political outlook, critics alternately register either Brown's conviction or his confusion. If writing from a place of firm conviction, he must be found somewhere between Federalist and Jeffersonian, between acolyte and critic of British radical

democrats, between republicanism and individualism.[47] But if considered confused or perhaps simply unsettled in his outlook, he vacillates in the critical record. In Stephen Watt's biography, Brown progresses along the common trajectory of a youthful radical wending toward a stodgy, conservative middle age. Jane Tompkins sees a confusing transformation from author of reactionary nightmares to agent of progressive subversion. The opposing impulses within single texts, some assert, evince a deep and almost pathological ambivalence.[48] In contrast, still others contend that the inconclusiveness and indeterminacies are the signs of an immanently rational, intellectual objectivity and disinterestedness.[49] But if we posit that Brown's work evinces both purposefulness and grotesqueness, then how does his brand of willed weirdness work within / against his cultural moment?

With reason as its guide, the movement for enlightened judgment and for the creation of enlightened forms of government, social structures, and cultural productions took a different view of remarkable deviations from the standard. In the rage to measure and describe, to quantify and categorize, so characteristic of the turn toward scientism, the people of Enlightenment worldviews sought to take the discomfort and disorientation out of mysterious or confusing phenomena, even if only through labeling. Lord Kames asserts that a human propensity for cataloguing and categorizing experience based on likeness results in the undeniable wonder and grave discomfort when encountering what he calls remarkable deviations from the standard. "Monstrous births," he observes, "exciting the curiosity of a philosopher, fail not at the same time to excite a sort of horror" (483-4).

Against a standard derived from an innate moral sense or from the refinement of the universal human capacity for reason, the grotesque stands as a lack or a failing; it exists only in a negative sense. In Kant's early work on aesthetics, the grotesque is characteristic of the backward and the barbaric as well as of the excessively refined. In his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), he invokes the term grotesque to signify an extremely degraded form of beauty and sublimity, a declension far from the ideal, exemplified for him by certain cultural practices, such as dueling and monastic rituals, and by certain cultural expressions, namely the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid and French fabliaux ("the most miserable grotesqueries ever hatched") (57). For many, the term grotesque, outside of design terminology, maintained an exclusively pejorative connotation.[50]

In contrast to grotesques that invoked divine mysteries or provoked profane laughter, the art of the period that came closest to the grotesque often took the form of caricatures that served to critique the corruption and absurdity of contemporary life. From Jonathan Swift's acerbic *A Modest Proposal* to Thomas Rowlandson's and James Gillray's political cartoons, the eighteenth century was a golden age of British satire both in belles lettres and visual art. Popular targets, not surprisingly, include French fashion trends, as well as native political figures, policies, and institutions. English painter and cartoonist William Hogarth's chaotic city scenes of debauchery, cruelty, ugliness, and criminality, however, reflect the horrors and absurdities of modern urban life. Similarly, the Spaniard Francisco Goya's series of etchings *Los Caprichos* (1799), a mix of realistic and fantastical images, depict outrageous and often grimly ludicrous acts of degradation and inhumanity.[51] The satires of Hogarth and Goya, one art historian observes,

exemplify a civic humanist concern with "clarifying the public's moral vision" (Craske 146-7).

Satire exaggerates so as to better reveal folly, vice, ugliness, and error and is founded on the idea of unmasking active deception and hypocrisy; but satire, often taking the form of caricature, is not in the strictest sense grotesque. That is, the work that pushes distortion and absurdity to the point of the grotesque undermines its own implicit reference to a standard of truth, goodness, and beauty. In a piece from 1775, Christoph Martin Wieland, expressing one of the earliest theories of the modern grotesque, distinguishes caricature from the grotesque. His model of the latter is the religious imagery of Pieter Brueghel which, he reports, provoked in him "surprise, laughter, and disgust" at the apparent absence of any connection to truth or natural order (Kayser 30). Thomson explains, "Unlike the satirist, the grotesque writer does not analyse and instruct in terms of right and wrong, or true or false, nor does he attempt to distinguish between these. On the contrary, he is concerned to demonstrate their inseparability" (42).

In contrast to Hogarth and Goya, other artists, they too confronting what they saw as cultural failings, use grotesque imagery to express a wary skepticism regarding rationality. Scientific approaches to human affairs are depicted as a potential source of perverse logical and moral outcomes. Piranesi's imaginary interiors, oppressively gloomy and impossibly overbuilt and cavernous, decry the diminution of the emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic aspects of human experience. The Gothic grotesques of Henry Fuseli blend the horrific and the erotic in a despairing vision that stands in direct contrast with the age's optimism about the progress of civilization.

However, still others considered the possibility that the grotesque held a kind of secret knowledge or dark wisdom about the human condition and the complexity of the natural and human worlds, whether that understanding was conceived of in spiritual terms or in terms more compatible with the rational conception of sublimity. Some artists, including L. J. Desprez and Philippe De Loutherbourg, both of them followers of Cagliostro, seemed enamored with the diabolical and darkly mysterious, believing it freed the mind of the artist from the rationalists' imposed limitations on invention (Craske 204-7).

Brown's novels appeared in the midst of this transition from eighteenth century notions toward Romantic notions of the grotesque as expressed first by Germans, like Wieland, Schlegel and Jean Paul, and then by Frenchmen, especially Hugo and Baudelaire, and, later, by Englishman John Ruskin. Where Brown actually uses the term *grotesque*, in both his fiction and essays, he retains the neo-classical connotation. In a work of literary criticism, "On the Portraits of Death," for example, he couples the term with the idea of vagueness, with lesser poets, and with the vulgar mass of readers (*Literary Essays* 112).[52] When in *Ormond* the well-to-do, white title character dons a blackface disguise and the persona of a simple-minded chimney sweep, the narrator pronounces it "the most entire and grotesque metamorphosis imaginable." "It was," she continues, "stepping from the highest to the lowest rank in society, and shifting himself into a form, as remote from his own, as those recorded by Ovid" (134). The word *grotesque* appears twice in *Edgar Huntly* where it is used to describe, first, the primitive ornamentation of a Native American moccasin and, second, the Native American woman Old Deb, who in the eyes of the settler community is a primal being, almost as one with

her dogs. Thus, the term *grotesque* and the term *chimera*, used synonymously at the time, convey in Brown's usage the then-conventional notion of an objectionable deficiency, absurdity, or savagery. But in practice, as we shall see, Brown anticipates the modern, post-classicist conception of the grotesque.[53]

His grotesques exhibit the resolute indeterminacy of this modern conception, which is also the recovery of the eternal or unchanging grotesque, as opposed to the assumption of fundamental truths underlying both serious and satirical works. And in this his works appear distinct from his contemporary literary world. Indeed, in their refusal to provide clear-cut moral instruction and the pleasure that comes from fulfilling reader expectations, Brown's grotesque novels are inherently antagonistic to the age's artistic imperatives. Unlike the social reformers Goya and Hogarth, Brown did not position himself as a sane man disgustedly holding up for derisive laughter and scorn a portrait of the irrational and corrupt world. One could pursue, however, some similarities with the grotesques that express skepticism toward the optimistic faith in enlightened reason, like that of Piranesi and Fuseli; but Brown's works do not carry the same tone of despair or of longing for a lost era.

Questioning Meaning

Brown's fiction explores not merely ideas per se but more inclusively that which is driving human actions and human history. He seems driven by a curiosity about what it is that moves people and about the mechanics of belief (what he often refers to as "the springs of action"). In his fiction, he tracks these concerns through a phenomenological examination of human belief and human behavior, sketching the outlines of the problematic of meaning making. In showing the evolution of thoughts and feelings in the

minds of characters in situations that blur for them the line between the clearly objective and the merely subjective, his fictions show that the operation of meaning-making involves more than simple conversions of sensory data into ideas. Human actions and judgments, his characters demonstrate, arise from passions and interests shaped by circumstance and passing through the available terms and ideas of the historical-cultural milieu. Given Brown's own historical and cultural milieu we might ask, what particular circumstances made him respond to it the way he did? His personal history may suggest something toward an answer.

From childhood Brown was sickly, bookish, and somewhat socially-reticent. Although he would be an early and vigorous champion of a national cultural identity, the very young Brown had a mixed experience of the triumph of the American Revolution. His father had been among a dozen or so Quakers singled out by a special committee for arrest and an eight-month-long detainment early in the war after they had invoked religious objections to swearing an oath of loyalty to the revolutionary cause. Brown, the fourth of five sons and one daughter that grew to adulthood, was doted on by his parents Elijah, a conveyancer, dry goods retailer, and importer, and Mary Armitt Brown, part of a well-off family, who gave him the freethinking intellectual background of the Society of Friends and sent him to Robert Proud's Latin Grammar School. Classmates there cajoled him into joining the Belles Lettres Society, which later became the Society for the Attainment of Useful Knowledge; and, after beginning his apprenticeship in the office of prominent Philadelphia lawyer Alexander Wilcocks, he participated in the Law Society. Both groups were dedicated in their respective fields to honing the skills of writing, analysis, and discourse. In 1793, the year he quit his law apprenticeship, he was witness

at close quarters to the physical and moral horrors of a devastating plague and the associated panic. At the same time, the violent vicissitudes of the French Revolution presented an on-going demonstration of the paradoxes of human conduct and the human condition.

It was during this period that he had the great good fortune to enjoy the friendship as well as the intellectual, moral, and, possibly, material support of some extraordinary, up-and-coming young men and women, most importantly a Yale graduate and contemporary in age, Elihu Hubbard Smith. After becoming one of the university's youngest ever graduates at age fifteen, Smith continued his medical studies first in Connecticut and then in 1791 in Philadelphia under the illustrious Dr. Benjamin Rush. Sometime in the fall or winter of that year he met and befriended Brown. When a few years later Smith settled in New York City to set up his practice, Brown visited often and became a member of a conversation circle that Smith founded named the New York Friendly Club. It seems likely that the model of literary industry held before in him in the form of Smith, who found time to edit the first anthology of American poetry (1793) and write an opera libretto, influenced his decision to leave the law. Smith, a deist and voracious reader of the writings that inspired or were inspired by the French Revolution, certainly would have spurred his companion's engagement with big ideas about reason, faith, science, history, and art. This time would serve as Brown's ersatz college years, and Smith and the people he met through him would have a profound influence on the aspiring writer's intellectual and emotional development as well as his craft and career.

The Friendly Club, one of many in this era of voluntary associations and societies, met weekly for the purpose of intellectual exchange, mutual improvement, and

enlightened sociality. Its members were or would soon become some of the most accomplished figures of their generation, including playwright and painter William Dunlap; future state supreme court justice James Kent; Samuel Miller, a Presbyterian minister; his brother Dr. Edward Miller; and Samuel Latham Mitchell, a future U. S. senator. The latter two were both physicians and co-editors (along with Smith) of the nation's first medical journal *Medical Repository* (1797-1824). Together the group debated a wide range of issues, informed by and usually in response to recent publications from Europe. Some members reached out to their favored authors, exchanging letters across the Atlantic with the thinkers who so inspired them, including philosopher and novelist William Godwin and the physician, poet, and natural philosopher Erasmus Darwin. As with these figures, Smith's circle considered compositional skill and literary artistry no secondary attainment. "Central to the Friendly Club's mission," Bryan Waterman, author of a monograph on the group explains, "was the refinement of their literary sensibilities"; and it was among these friends that Brown circulated his fiction as works-in-progress, receiving encouragement, advice, and critiques.[54]

He wrote at an incredible pace. In the four years from 1798 through 1801, in addition to all six of his published novels (the four major works already mentioned, plus *Clara Howard* and *Jane Talbot*), a serialized book-length fiction, and a large fragment of an unfinished novel, Brown composed the majority of the pieces published in the *Monthly Magazine*, which he edited from its launch in April 1799 until its last issue in December 1800. In his major fiction, Brown combines actual events and the gloomy plots of his invention in a bid to call attention to the complex relation of imagination and

reality. Adhering to his own notions of probability (no supernaturalism), he punctuates his realism with bizarre occurrences, incredible coincidences, and shocking transgressions that court disbelief and perhaps, as we have seen, disgust.

Brown wrote not finished, closed texts, but rather open-ended and fractured narratives, which is not to say that his plots were haphazardly constructed or merely meandering streams of invention.[55] Responding to this apparent resistance to closure, some critics take the view that Brown's works are test labs of various philosophical positions, counterfactual histories that ultimately serve as intellectual exercises in disinterested enquiry rather than as a partisan argument. Although the works do maintain integrity in entertaining different viewpoints, in resisting a one-sided presentation, Brown, I would argue, does not seek only an idealized state of philosophical objectivity for its own sake, as if striving for a position outside the argument, above it. But this does not mean that he offers any straightforward answers either. Rather he offers a heuristic exercise, an experience that evokes a sense of a rich and ever-evolving encounter, more like real life, rather than a philosophical argument.

Constructing the Other and the Self

Brown's bizarre gothic tales and chronicles of hopeless romantic dilemmas are in essence meditations on the relation between the self and the other, which accounts for their being so open to modern critical approaches concerned with constructions of otherness, whether colonial, racial, sexual, gendered, or socio-economic. The narrators even expressly address the construction of otherness, particularly its failures. Clara Wieland, justifying her arming herself before meeting with Carwin, declares: "Let that man who shall purpose to assign motives to the actions of another, blush at his folly and

forbear. Not more presumptuous would it be to attempt the classification of all nature, and the scanning of supreme intelligence" (146). And this sentiment echoes through subsequent narratives, all told by narrators who either explicitly disclaim or unconsciously belie objectivity and special knowledge.

All of that which in the characters' minds appears inconsistent, inconclusive, and contradictory calls attention to the uncertainty surrounding the self's constructions of the other. Through encounters with human beings whose appearance, sentiments, or behaviors seem to counter expectations, violate categories or concepts, and embody contradictions, characters come to discover (or at least reveal to the reader) the insuperable limits of those characteristic faculties of the conscious self: perception, judgment, imagination, reason, and will. Sensational incidents, from seemingly supernatural phenomena to horrific epidemics to improbable coincidences, engender uncertainty about origins and consequences and frustrate the self's efforts to reduce all experience to a pleasing sense of order or comprehension.

Brown's novels are portraits of the self estranged from the world and from itself. And indeed the failings of the self's constructions of otherness lead to the self becoming an object of its own reflections, in effect, becoming another enigmatical other. Decades before Poe, Brown would use Gothicisms to explore this otherness within. In his best-known works Brown uses what he admits in the preface to *Wieland* are "extraordinary and rare" incidents to illustrate the dissociation of the individual's conscious self from his or her emotional and physiological reactions, a sometimes antagonistic bifurcation in the ostensibly stable, unified, and knowable self. This potential for self-conflict is spectacularly realized in the spontaneous combustion of the elder Wieland, who tries in

vain to repress the demands of his conscience and is killed by a fire originating within. But the destructive power of this internal conflict reaches out beyond the self. Consider the unconscious actions of the sleepwalkers in *Edgar Huntly* and the virtual blackout obscuring Constantia's fatal encounter with Ormond. Even if such gaps in consciousness occur only in rare and extreme instances, they nevertheless demonstrate the self's inability to always know its own motivations or to square its feelings and actions with its beliefs and intentions.[56] And even as some characters acknowledge a lack of control over or insight into otherness, they do so only to suggest one still has the power and the duty to minimize the distortions in the chain of perception, interpretation, and response. Adopting an associative psychology like David Hartley's, Clara Wieland posits, "The will is the tool of the understanding, which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of sense. If the senses be depraved it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding" (*Wieland* 35). But even this is too optimistic an appraisal of the self's relative autonomy, for as events shall demonstrate the will is the tool of not only the understanding but of unconscious forces and external stimuli hidden from conscious awareness. Clara Wieland herself exemplifies self-conflicted conduct on more than one occasion, as when she finds herself fascinated with a visually unappealing but vocally well-endowed rustic and when she moves to confront rather than flee from a closeted intruder. Later, she wonders at her acquiescing to the villainous Carwin's invitation to meet her: "What was it that swayed me? I felt myself divested of the power to will contrary to the motives that determined me to seek his presence. My mind seemed to be split into separate parts, and these parts to have entered into furious and implacable contention" (140). Despite her name she is unable to achieve

clarity regarding her own behavior. Even her grammatical constructions, although often considered examples of Brown's bad writing, could be read as expressing her experience of the dissociation of her will from her actions, as when she slips into passive voice and reports the movements of her hand and the knife it holds as if they acted against her wish to not harm her menacing brother.[57] The protagonist of another novel, Edgar Huntly, laments this perversity of human nature: "Disastrous and humiliating is the state of man! By his own hands, is constructed the mass of misery and error in which his steps are forever involved" (278). And Jane Talbot's lover Henry Colden wonders whether such perversity springs from human nature or elsewhere: "And whence this incurable folly—this rooted incapacity of acting as every motive, generous and selfish, combine to recommend? Constitution; habit; insanity; the dominion of some evil spirit who insinuates his baneful power between the *will* and the *act*?" (382). Thus, the novels' grotesqueries demonstrate not only the instability of constructions of the other, but equally important the instability of the one making the constructions. With the loss of the self's stability and credibility, with the unreliability of the faculties of perception, imagination, judgment, and will comes the loss of the self's pretensions to cognitive and moral authority.

Importantly, all the pain caused by the (often extravagant) attempts to overcome uncertainty signify not just an epistemological but an ethical critique of the self's deeply-rooted habit of categorizing, assigning causes, calculating effects, and otherwise reducing all experience to comprehension. The drive to bring alterity into the realm of the known, to transcend all limits on the self's knowledge and being, comes with a cost. Considering the liabilities of the self, aiming at absolute, transcendent truth, even with the good of

others in mind, seems fraught with risk. Disastrous consequences follow the ostensibly selfless actions of many of the characters who seek or claim certainty. Clithero excoriates the well-meaning and obsessively curious Edgar Huntly for his reckless intervention:

> You, like others, are blind to the most momentous consequences of your own actions. You talk of imparting consolation. You boast the beneficence of your intentions. You set yourself to do me a benefit. What are the effects of your misguided zeal and random efforts? They have brought my life to a miserable close. They have shrouded the last scene of it in blood. They have put the seal to my perdition. (36)

Before the novel's end, Edgar's benevolent actions will result in Euphemia Lorimer's miscarriage and Clithero's apparent suicide. In contrast to Edgar's dedication to the cause of serving another, Ormond takes a pessimistic view, believing that "efforts designed to ameliorate the condition of an individual, were sure of answering a contrary purpose. The principles of the social machine must be rectified, before men can be beneficially active" (112). In espousing radical Enlightenment views, he disdains reigning bourgeois values as an arbitrary and pernicious influence on happiness. The greater good can only be achieved, he argues, by empowering worthy minds to access universal truth through true subjectivity. Blind to the contradictions in his doctrines, he zealously promotes Constantia's enlightenment with an Illuminati-like willingness to employ any means necessary, even, in this case, rape or, if need be, necrophilia. Narrator Sophia Courtland says of Ormond, "Considerations of justice and pity were made, by a fatal perverseness of reasoning, champions and bulwarks of his most atrocious mistakes"

(283); and it is equally true of Brown's other seekers and ideologues, including Wieland, Clithero, Edgar Huntly, Clara Howard, and arguably Arthur Mervyn, all of different views but all liable to the errors of false transcendence. The novels ultimately discredit the benevolent intentions of both republicanism's ideal of civic virtues and the ethical subjectivism of liberalism. Their outcomes demonstrate the futility and indeed ethical danger of founding judgments on the false authority of the self.

Brown's grotesques suggest that what passes as our knowledge and understanding is merely the imposition of meaning onto a fundamentally unknowable universe. Indeed, encounters with the grotesque can be viewed as an opportunity to move toward the outside of our systems of thought and beyond systemizing consciousness generally to engage otherness qua otherness, rather than reduce it to a cognitive construct, to assimilate it into a system of thought. Such a movement toward the outside requires not that the intellect be turned off but that it be put into a continual dialogue with experience as it unfolds, experience of the outer world of sensible phenomena and experience of the inner world of one's thoughts and emotions.

In the chapters that follow, I focus my efforts on attending to a limited number of works in great detail in an attempt to exercise the kind of fine awareness of and continuous attention to the otherness of these writings that I believe they counsel as an ethical praxis. I begin with a detailed analysis of *Wieland* and the manner in which the novel seems to challenge the conventional moral judgment underscoring the era's Gothic murder narratives. Taking a close look at the various philosophical outlooks of the major characters, I find that each rests upon a distinction between body and mind, between selfishness and beneficence that proves untenable. The appearance of mysterious

phenomena and the entrance of an oddly alluring stranger are enough to expose a latent and dangerous dynamic within the group of self-consciously enlightened young adults who seem oblivious to their own ostensibly virtuous but ultimately murderously narcissistic impulses. My next chapter focuses on *Ormond*, placing that work in the context of the era's profound concern over and experimentation with the fictionality of social and political life. Whether reactionary or exploitative, the characters' various responses to the increasing malleability of appearances in an ever more commercialized and individualistic world prove disastrously misguided. Ordering schemes that rely on the assumption of an underlying, fixed reality and a moral system indexed to it not only fail to promote ethical responsibility but even sanction the exploitative and deadly instrumentalization of other human beings. In the actions of the eminently responsive and responsible Constantia, Brown offers an alternative to the moral economy of limited liability. Moving on, I dedicate the last chapter to examining the various strands of thought that together inform Brown's remarkable literary practice and find expression in his equally remarkable literary essays and reviews. My aim is to reiterate and reconsider the question of the novels' depictions of truth and the ethical and to trace the sources and development of his understanding of literature, of the art of the story-telling moralist, as "the most efficacious of moral instruments" ("Walstein's" 35).

Chapter 2: "Abortive Creations": Incest and Conceptions of Morality in *Wieland*

In his courthouse confession, as "faithfully recorded" by one of his hearers, Theodore Wieland presents an explicit and, considering the circumstances, somewhat straightforward recital of the central event in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland; or, The Transformation: An American Tale* [1798](163). "With a mild countenance," he tells of the night he murdered his wife and children (164). The account is chilling, not only for the subject matter but for the remorselessness even haughtiness with which it is delivered. And as scholars point out, it retains many of the particulars of the actual event from which Brown drew his inspiration. The anonymous "An Account of a Murder Committed by Mr. J---Y---, upon His Family, in December, A.D. 1781" appeared in New York and Philadelphia newspapers in the summer of 1796 and included the recorded statements of the confessed killer James Yates and of the only survivor of his attacks, his sister (3).[58] In 1801 an early reviewer of *Wieland* identified this case as that to which Brown refers in the prefatory "Advertisement" as a "remarkably similar" incident.[59] And indeed the incidents are remarkably similar; a comparison reveals several direct borrowings. Just as in Brown's fictional work, the real-life father and husband who murdered his family was an American farmer, both pious and loving, until a divine injunction triggered his sudden violent outburst. In both accounts, the killer, after slaying his nuclear family, goes to the house of his sister to complete his sacrificial offering, only to be captured. And both killers, after their capture, refuse to accept the authority of human law to hold them accountable.

However, Brown makes selective use of his sources, changing and expanding the original material in ways that go beyond the literary imperative of crafting a compelling

story. Much attention has naturally been given to the more substantial additions to the central murder narrative: the bizarre and traumatic death of the Wieland siblings' father and, more especially, the introduction of Francis Carwin, a wanderer who wields a powerful tool of deception. To some, Brown's use of spontaneous human combustion and "biloquism," presented as they are as seemingly wondrous phenomena that are nevertheless grounded in "established laws" and "known principles," suggests the work be read as an example of deistic skepticism (19, 3).[60] Other readings of *Wieland* focus on the device of biloquism (which combines both mimicry and ventriloquy) as a trope for the operations of representative democracy with all its promises and perils.[61] Several commentators find in Carwin's manipulations a meta-fictional interrogation of the profession of authorship and the place of imagination in the young republic.[62] And some critics investigating *Wieland*'s relation to the Yates narrative have focused on some small yet thematically significant differences. Brown, for example, moves the timeframe of events to the years between the end of the French and Indian War (1763) and the start of the Revolutionary War (1775), the era of America's incipient self-fashioning. He also changes the location from the Yates's humble farm in Tomhannock, New York to a large estate outside of his hometown of Philadelphia, the cultural and economic center of the colonies. As part of the trend in Brown criticism (and Early American criticism more widely) toward the tracing of trans-Atlantic connections, some have argued such changes serve to place local events against a background of imperial wars, revolutions, and shifts in political and economic power.[63]

A common thread running through a good deal of the recent work on Brown's writings is an interest in what can be called their discursive and performative aspects.[64]

However, despite a general consensus in current criticism regarding Brown's exhumation and exploitation of the assumptions embedded in narrative forms, critics otherwise differ widely in their conclusions about the novel's engagement with issues of authority, transparency, and transcendence.[65] I hope to move beyond, or sidestep, the critical impasse as I focus not on a political but on a moral reading and on how the novel calls into question the grounds of narrativity and subjectivity through the grotesqueries of the sensual body.

"Beyond the Conception of Human Beings"

The newspaper notice of the Yates incident was only one of many entries in an increasingly popular genre in the latter part of the eighteenth century: the true-crime murder narrative. In *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the Gothic American Imagination* (1998), historian Karen Halttunen examines many such published accounts of homicidal mayhem, tracing in them the development of new narrative strategies for coming to terms with human evil in America. From the seventeenth through the early parts of the eighteenth centuries, she explains, public responses to some horrific deed, nearly all composed by clergymen, aimed at using the event as an occasion to reflect upon the Calvinist doctrine of the innate depravity of all men. The reader or listener was exhorted toward identification with the criminal; the crime was conceived of as a warning that God's grace alone is all that keeps any one of us from committing similar atrocities. But as the explanatory power of religious doctrine began to give way to the Enlightenment faith in reason, she argues, new narratives emerged, narratives linking the criminal act not to mankind's sinful nature but to more humanistic causes. As Lockean psychology gained adherents, murder narratives, now increasingly penned by laypersons,

reflected a newfound interest in environmental factors and their influence on individual dispositions and physiologies. With this rising belief in the individual's capacity for unlimited intellectual and moral development (or degeneration), the origins of murderous acts were increasingly sought in the perpetrator's poor upbringing, in the misapplication of his or her reason toward some misbegotten end, in a failure of will in the face of passion, or in a derangement of the senses. And yet, developing in tandem with such naturalistic approaches was a fascination with the extraordinary cases, those instances for which these explanations did not fit the facts. In defiance of the supposedly universal moral sense, some who were raised in good environments killed dispassionately and without apparent illicit motive. Troubled by such explanatory failures, Halttunen argues, "the emerging secular literature organized the popular response to murder within a set of narrative conventions that are most usefully characterized as Gothic" (3). Referring to both factual and fictive murder narratives, she explains, "The gothic tale of murder repeatedly and ritualistically failed to assign meaning to the crime because it sought to comprehend radical human evil within the larger intellectual context of Enlightenment liberalism, which did not recognize radical human evil" (4). Newspaper articles, broadsides of criminal confessions, and pamphlets concerned with sensational crimes, especially murder, focused more and more on the horrific details of the criminal act and on its seemingly unaccountable nature. The graphic account of the Yates familicide, in which children's brains are dashed out, a wife's face battered beyond recognition, and a young girl's forehead split with an axe, ends with expressions of bafflement and terrible awe: "The cause of his wonderfully cruel proceedings," the writer declares, "is beyond the conception of human beings" (rpt. in Waterman *Wieland* 270).

And it is in the apparent lack of any clear explanation that the meaning, the moral of the story, is embedded. Gothic horror and mystery, whether adopted consciously or not, became a means of accounting for evil doings, a way of defending against the unsettling notion of an inherent, irreducible irrationality in human nature and conduct. Halttunen argues that even the "narratives of incomprehension, whose common pattern was to try *and fail* to come to terms with the crime within the contemporary liberal view of human nature" ultimately upheld the underlying view of human nature as innately good, rational, and capable of self-government (46). They did so by characterizing the killer as a "a moral monster from whom readers were instructed to shrink, with a sense of *horror* that confirmed their own 'normalcy' in the face of the morally alien, and with a sense of *mystery* that testified to their own inability even to conceive of such an aberrant act" (5). Thus, the evil that men do, according to the early Gothic narrative, is not done by men (or women) at all, properly understood, but by those who have lost their claim to humanity: the madmen, the savages, and the perverts. "The new Gothic murderer—like the villain in Gothic fiction–was first and last a moral monster, between whom and the normal majority yawned an impassable gulf," Halttunen writes (5).

Against this exhaustively researched and cogent analysis of the embedded assumptions in non-fiction murder narratives and the manner in which they reflect and shape the emergent modern subject and its moral self-image, Brown's novelization of the Yates account appears all the more strange.[66] For its readers, *Wieland* offers neither the consolation of rational explanation nor the moral absolution of blaming the inconceivably evil other. Or perhaps one could say that through its multiplicity of voices it incongruously and inconclusively offers both. The bizarre occurrences strangely,

incompletely explained reveal the limitations of human reason, as do those of preceding Gothic narratives. But the resolute uncertainties of *Wieland*, obtaining in the face of different explanatory structures, call into question the very ground of truth and meaning and serve to dissolve any absolute distinction between reality and illusion, reason and madness, word and world, even subject and object. And the fractured and confessedly confused first-person narrative, which in preceding Gothic works implicitly manifests the virtuous incomprehension of the narrator (and the gentle reader), in this novel works to undermine any categorical separation of good men and grotesque monsters.

"The Moral Constitution of Man"

In the prefatory "Advertisement," Brown claims the aim of the work is "the illustration of some important branches of the moral constitution of man" and goes on to defend his use of "extraordinary and rare" incidents by asserting that "it is the business of moral painters to exhibit their subject in its most instructive and memorable forms" (3). That moral instruction, however, passes through the opaque medium of an unreliable narrator, the archly named Clara Wieland.[67] Obscuring matters more, Clara's narrative comprises multiple perspectives on the strange events, perspectives that vary not only from person to person but also within individuals and, particularly in her own case, from one time to another. As we first encounter her, writing soon after her brother's suicide, the historicizing Clara introduces a detailed narrative of the events leading up to the destruction of her entire family and of her will to live. She endeavors, as she claims, not for her sake, but only to inform her unnamed family friend or friends of everything that has happened and to perhaps offer some benefit to mankind in the form of a psychological case study and cautionary tale. But this initial stoicism and magnanimity

yield in the next breath to an upwelling of dismay and outrage—"Listen to my narrative, and then say what it is that has made me deserve to be placed on this dreadful eminence, if, indeed, every faculty be not suspended in wonder that I am still alive, and am able to relate it"—before settling into a more dispassionate, reportorial tone (6).[68] After summarizing her father's "turbulent life and mysterious end," her and her brother's otherwise idyllic childhood, and their leisured life of enlightened conviviality with the Pleyel siblings, Catharine, whom Theodore marries, and Henry, who is the object of Clara's romantic visions, this Clara, however, appears only intermittently throughout the narrative, often to comment upon the extreme difficulty of writing it (83). Clara the historian more often fades into the background as she channels the immediate impressions and interpretations of the Clara-within-the-story, the "sufferer of these disasters" (147). It is yet another, rather changed Clara that narrates the last chapter, an epilogue composed three years after the much longer preceding letter. And each of these Claras takes a different view of what happens and what it all means, most especially in regards to the assignment of blame and the attitude toward the supposed Gothic villain, Francis Carwin.

Throughout their acquaintance with him, everything Clara and the others thought they knew about Carwin proves to be wrong. He simply does not fit into the narratives by which they try to solve the problem of his identity and intentions. On first seeing him, Clara infers from his clothing that he is a stereotypical rustic and reflects "on the alliance which commonly subsists between ignorance and the practice of agriculture" (51). Upon the next encounter, however, he shocks her with his classical eloquence. Similarly, Pleyel, who had met Carwin on his travels in Europe, believed him to be a native of

Spain before accepting his assertion that he is an Englishman by birth. Yet, the newcomer later tells Clara he is like them, a fellow Pennsylvanian (199). Also, despite his own apparent confession, he is not a "ravisher" (97, 209). His explanation that he has hidden in Clara's closet in order to lay siege to her honor is, as he subsequently admits, merely a cover story improvised to preserve the secret of his biloquial talents. That she readily accepts his assertions about his predatory intentions and their being thwarted by a supernatural foe speaks to how neatly his fiction reproduces the Gothic and seduction narratives by which the era was increasingly expressing and ordering its worldview.

But in striking contrast to the mantle of mystery adorning the sublimely diabolical evil-doers of the conventional Gothic melodrama, the indeterminacy of Carwin is, like his rustic attire, more homespun. He seems both too sympathetic and too pathetic a character to be a Gothic villain. His duplicity and evasions, as later revealed, are the products of his all-too-human insecurities and impulses, of both the self-serving and the benevolent sort. And his auditory illusions, like his false confession to being a phantom-haunted would-be rapist, succeed due less to his demoniacal cleverness and more to his auditors' preconceptions. As to his having uttered the decree that spurred the killings, Carwin's accuser, reflectively citing the signs of surprise and horror she read in his body language, finds she cannot convict him.[69] Finally, after struggling and failing to rationalize her indictment of him as the agent ultimately responsible for her family's destruction, the historicizing Clara ends the penultimate chapter with a suicidal resignation to her miserable fate and to the vexed question of Carwin's guilt.

Even after confronting the true killer, Clara finds less certainty not more. The unrepentant murderer Theodore Wieland, though behaving like a madman, is not the

moral alien one expects to find in a Gothic narrative either. Before his bloody rampage, Wieland is a paragon of virtue and reasonableness. He is pious and, in a way aligned with progressive Enlightenment views, he is egalitarian in his relations with women. And Clara, knowing that the mysterious voices were heard by more than just her brother alone, cannot accept Dr. Cambridge's explanation that the well-intentioned man has fallen victim to maniacal illusions "not more difficult of explication and cure than most affections of our frame" (179). As long as science can neither account for the strange phenomena nor, as Clara avers, disprove supernatural intelligences, Wieland's interpretation of events remains not altogether implausible (181). Given what appeared to be the case, then, this confessed killer's actions are not, strictly speaking, irrational; and, if conscious intent is the measure, neither are they unethical.[70] Moreover, Clara expressly admires his near Christ-like faith in the very act that makes him the destroyer of her family and almost of her own life. Even after her brother's repeated attempts to kill her, she thinks of him as one "who has vied with the great teacher of [his] faith in sanctity of motives, and elevation above sensual and selfish!" (231).

Unlike other early Gothic narratives, *Wieland's* ostensible villains and heroes seem to carry the source of their grandiose errors and spectacular vices in their very humanity, in that with which readers can identify, not as foreign influence, like the dæmonic intercession hypothesized by Clara, not as a perversion of the natural order of the human mind, the view of Dr. Cambridge, but as an extension of their supposed virtues of goodness, rationality, and self-governance. Writing of her brother, Clara sums up her rather un-Gothic circumstances:

> What a tale had thus been unfolded! I was hunted to death, not by one whom my misconduct had exasperated, who was conscious of illicit motives, and who sought his end by circumvention and surprise; but by one who deemed himself commissioned for this act by heaven, who regarded this career of horror as the last refinement of virtue, whose implacability was proportioned to the reverence and love which he felt for me, and who was inaccessible to the fear of punishment and ignominy! (189)

Thus, when one considers the common pattern of the era's murder narratives, which approached the problem of human evil by denying the humanity of the evil-doer, it becomes apparent that Clara's attempts to construct such a narrative, one that "tries and fails to come to terms with the crime within the contemporary liberal view of human nature," is itself a failure. Readers expecting the exposure of the villain as an inhuman moral alien are left at a loss.

Notwithstanding the explanations and pat moralizations offered by Clara the revisionist in the final chapter (to which I will return later), the causes, meanings, and very reality of events remain hopelessly obscured. Despite some similarities to the "explained supernaturalism" exemplified by Anne Radcliffe's novels, the mysteries of Mettingen do not fall to rational explanation; they do not conform to any coherent narrative structure.[71] That is, for each of the strange incidents, the novel offers enough detail to support a number of provisional conjectures, some complementary, some mutually exclusive; but in the final analysis none is without serious flaws. Questions both factual and moral remain unanswered.[72]

But in the characters' repeated efforts to make sense of these experiences and of their own actions and inner worlds, *Wieland* quite effectively calls attention to the complex operations of human comprehension and human conduct, to the contending means of ascertaining truth, and to what might be broadly thought of as the problematic relation of content and form. The grotesqueries of the elder Wieland's demise and of Francis Carwin's person and performances disrupt and denaturalize the relation of form to content, complicating notions of symbolic representations (the relation of language and narrative to events and meaning) and of personal identity (the relation of mind to body, of subject to object, and of inside to outside). Moreover, the grotesqueries are not limited to what is *in* the narrative (its content) but also obtain in the language and structure *of* the narrative (its form).

As Mark Seltzer has already pointed out, much of the strangeness of this story's content arises from the fact that language in the narrative repeatedly transforms as if by sympathetic magic into actual events: metaphor becomes reality, or as Seltzer puts it, "saying makes it so." Taking Seltzer's insight further, we notice that not only do characters' words become their realities; these transformations reverberate throughout their social network.[73] Connecting the experiences of different characters are events, language, and actions that occur, recur, and recur again in a repeating pattern of like meeting and mating with like, producing copies of itself, but with increasing intensity and evermore exaggerated effect. In the proliferation of seemingly commonplace and innocuous imagery—for example, the light of truth and transcendence and the precipices, abysses, storms, billows, and fiery eruptions of worldly danger and destruction—we see a

kind of conceptual inbreeding, an incestuous relation producing monstrous effects in the material world.

The presentation of an earlier incident, the "strange and terrible" end of Clara and Theodore Wieland's father, initiates the narrative's extended engagement with the mysteries of physical and symbolic embodiment (13). Although on the night of his death the elder Wieland spoke of his being doomed for neglecting to carry out a command from God (a doom announced to him in a voice that only he could hear), Clara's uncle, the surgeon Thomas Cambridge, who is the source of her knowledge of the incident, considers more naturalistic explanations for the catastrophe that soon followed. A mysterious bang and flash calling him to the temple where the elder Wieland performed his solitary midnight orations, Cambridge finds the badly burned man dying from horrific injuries. The more immediate ideas that the elder Wieland had been struck by lightning, however, or that he had been attacked (first, cudgeled by someone carrying a lantern, then, intentionally or not, set ablaze) appear unsatisfactory to the narrator's mind, because such explanations, we are told, are inconsistent with a number of details, including the father's "gloomy anticipations and unconquerable anxiety," his assumed security from harm due to his character and "the place and conditions of the times," as well as the cloudless skies. Readers may be right to note that the narrator, who we must remember is the victim's daughter, too easily dismisses the possibility of an attack. The dying elder Wieland's account strikes his brother-in-law as "an imperfect tale" such that he "was inclined to believe that half the truth had been suppressed" (18). This the victim's evasiveness along with the glancing reference to slave labor forming the basis of the Wieland fortune may suggest to readers both a possible nearby killer and a motive.[74]

But if Cambridge's own eyewitness testimony is to be believed, and Clara argues it should be "because no man's temper is more skeptical, and his belief is unalterably attached to natural causes," then we are still left unable to account for such details as "the fiery cloud that enveloped [the victim], without detriment to the structure, though composed of combustible materials" and "the sudden vanishing of this cloud at [her] uncle's approach" (19). Clara considers another explanation: the (pseudo-) naturalistic phenomenon of spontaneous human combustion, or to use her terms, "the irregular expansion of the fluid that imparts warmth to our heart and our blood caused by the fatigue of the preceding day, or flowing, by established laws, from the condition of his thoughts" (19). Here is appended an academic-style footnote referencing an actual Italian journal's account of an apparent case of spontaneous human combustion that resulted in injuries exactly like those of the elder Wieland. Both the novel's author (that is, the author as he presents himself here, what we might call the author character) and its narrator seem to draw on the language and the authority of science. However, just as in the original account, pieces of the puzzle do not fit—such as the victim's testimony that a spark fell upon his clothes, igniting them as from an external source—and science seems to have only an imperfect grasp on the phenomenon. And thus, despite the stated claim that researchers have "thrown some light upon this subject," the authorial intervention seems only to cloud the issue (19).[75] As the noxious stench of "insupportable exhalations and crawling putrefactions" drives everyone from the house to seek escape, the father's grotesque body, we might say, provokes an ideological retreat, with characters fleeing this existential threat, seeking, according to their background and makeup, various

comforting notions of an objective reality and of a language able to faithfully convey it (18).

"Sublimer Views"

In their reflections upon this foundational event, Clara and her brother evince their respective epistemologies and emotional dispositions, as well as their aesthetic and moral sensibilities—all of which the text serves to call into question and call to account. Clara's tale of her father's demise, ending as it does without resolution, with only a list of conjectures in the form of unanswered queries, is in keeping with her younger self's unexamined notions of the nature and the grounds of knowledge. By her own admission, hers was a rather undisciplined search for truth. Whether in regard to material or spiritual truth, she was apt to focus less on ordering her thoughts than on attending to her sensations. Describing the nature and development of her worldview, she insists, "It must not be supposed that we [she and Catharine, with whom she shares a temperament and an education,] were without religion, but with us it was the product of lively feelings, excited by reflection on our own happiness, and by the grandeur of external nature" (22). Clara perceives and judges according to the dictates of sentiment and a vaguely defined moral sensibility, less an epistemology than an aesthetic. When confronted with the unknown, her attention turns to the pleasurable sensations mystery affords:

> My reflections [on my father's death] never conducted me to certainty, but the doubts that existed were not of a tormenting kind. I could not deny that the event was miraculous, and yet I was invincibly averse to that method of solution. My wonder was excited by the inscrutableness of the

> cause, but my wonder was unmixed with sorrow or fear. It begat in me a thrilling, and not unpleasing solemnity. (34-5)

What she describes here is a taste for the sublime, what Enlightenment thinkers like Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant defined as the species of delight arising from contemplating at a safe distance that which evokes fear and awe.[76] Her valorization of sublime affect is also in evidence in her remarks on the deadly imperialist conflicts raging somewhere out beyond the boundaries of the Wielands' comfortable estate:

> The sound of war had been heard, but it was at such a distance as to enhance our enjoyment by affording objects of comparison. The Indians were repulsed on the one side, and Canada was conquered on the other. Revolutions and battles, however calamitous to those who occupied the scene, contributed in some sort to our happiness, by agitating our minds with curiosity, and furnishing causes of patriotic exultation. (26)

Although these remarks may suggest a lack of compassion or at least a kind of obliviousness, they are certainly intended to reflect something like an acute sensitivity. In Enlightenment thought, the refinement of one's ability to appreciate the sublime, that is, the development of one's aesthetic sensibility, or taste, was considered an exercise of the same mental faculty responsible for moral judgment.[77] The sensations elicited by great spectacles and delicate beauties, whether artistic productions, epic human events, or "the grandeur of external nature," were dependent upon the perceiving subject's perfection of disinterested discernment, the degree to which one could appreciate phenomena that offered no direct material benefit, that served no personal needs and gratified no base, that is, merely bodily desires.[78]

Clara represents the era's proto-romantic faith in sensibility, both an outgrowth of and reaction against Enlightenment rationalism. Distrustful of a strict reliance on abstract logic and skeptical of the adequacy and transparency of language, she defers instead to a natural language of true feelings faithfully conveyed in tones, gestures, looks, and other non-verbal cues. Born of the Lockean idea that knowledge derives from sensory experience and sensitive to questions of both truth and values, the school of sensibility recognized the need to guard against false appearances and specious claims. Clara writes, "The will is the tool of understanding, which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of sense. If the senses be depraved, it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow from the consequent deductions of the understanding" (35). And reflecting upon her own later behavior, her unaccountable fixation with Carwin's face, Clara observes, "So flexible, and yet so stubborn, is the human mind. So obedient to impulses the most transient and brief, and yet so unalterably observant of the direction which is given to it!" (54). This mechanistic view of the workings of the mind, of its susceptibility to external influence, serves, on one hand, to deflect responsibility for one's thoughts and actions but also carries an admonition to be vigilant against deception and the infectious power of words, what John Adams called the "soft compulsion" (qtd. in Fliegelman xxxvi). Unlike *The Mystery of Udolpho*'s Emily St. Aubert and, of course, *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland, Clara Wieland projects an image of cultivated sensibility as well as great self-control. Exemplifying her relative independence and her desire to be "an economist of pleasure," she insists upon living apart from Wieland and his wife, alone, but for her young maid Judith, in a house three quarters of a mile distant from the main house (22). Refined and sensible, she is unimpressed by tales of ghosts and robbers and

explicitly disdains the plebian pleasures of terror novels. Instead, she and her cohorts indulge their thoroughly modern tastes in the study of Ciceronian rhetoric, in performances of German productions of an "adventurous and lawless fancy," and in discussions of natural spectacles, such as the waterfall at Monongahela, all of which marks the group's elite sensitivity to and rational, disinterested appreciation of the effects of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque.

Yet the balance of sensibility and reason varies in each of the Mettingenites. Turning in her remarks from her and her friend's outlook to Wieland's rather more sober deportment, Clara in her equivocal, noncommittal way states that she "will not say whether he was indebted to sublimer views for this disposition," once again conflating aesthetics, epistemology, and moral being (22). In contrast to the sensational epistemology of Clara and Catharine who "sought not a basis for [their] faith, in the weighing of proofs, and the dissection of creeds" and whose "devotion was a mixed and casual sentiment, seldom verbally expressed, or solicitously sought, or carefully retained," Wieland's rigid certainty regarding his father's death— he always saw it "as flowing from a direct and supernatural decree"—and his considered philosophical views more broadly, arise from a deep religious faith combined with the diligent pursuit of truth through intense study and the exercise of strict logic (35, 22). "All his actions and practical sentiments," Clara writes, "are linked with long abstruse deductions from the system of divine government and the laws of our intellectual constitution. He is, in some respects, an enthusiast, but is fortified in his belief by innumerable arguments and subtilties" (35). Thus, in character he is much like his father, Clara explains, "but the mind of the son was enriched by science, and embellished with literature" (23). Like the

elder Wieland, whose narrow constructions of religious scripture, starting with the injunction "Seek and ye shall find," results in his finding only what he seeks, the younger Wieland too "discovers only confirmations of his faith" (25). In Theodore's worldview, we see the father's Manichean binaries of good and evil (derived from Albigensian teachings that associated good with the realm of spirit and evil with the world of physical being) strengthened by their parallels with Enlightenment optimism regarding the quasi-divine power of human reason and with the liberal view of human nature in which evil actions evince the usurpation of rationality by sensuality.

The sober and pious Wieland meets his match in erudition and discernment, we are told, when Catharine's brother, the glib and irreverent Henry Pleyel, enters the picture after some years in Europe. As his French surname and German educational background suggest, Pleyel brings to the group the ideas advanced by the *philosophes* and the *aufklarer*, those progressive thinkers who opposed traditional ideas of authority in favor of individualism and humanist rationalism. Comparing the two young men, Clara reports:

> Their creeds [. . .] were in many respects opposite. Where one discovered [in the history and metaphysics of religion] only confirmations of his faith, the other could find nothing but reasons for doubt. Moral necessity, and calvinistic inspiration, were the props on which my brother thought proper to repose. Pleyel was the champion of intellectual liberty, and rejected all guidance but that of his reason. (25)

Turning away from theological arguments to a system of theorizing based on logical extrapolation from empirical evidence, the purveyors of Pleyel's way of thinking strove

to naturalize the traditional hierarchical division found in both the Cartesian duality of mind and body and the Calvinistic antinomies of selfless faith and fleshly sin. What were once considered separate and qualitatively different ontological realms came to be reconciled by Enlightenment thinkers into a "dynamic natural system subject to general laws of growth and development" (Martin and Barresi 141). However, the underlying value structure stayed in place. In the new, modern view, the individual progressed, with proper external guidance and with internal will power and discipline, from venal sensuality to disinterested reason.[79]

As such, Clara's assertion that Henry and Theodore espoused contending systems of thought, both of which contrasted with her and Catharine's less aggressively intellectual dispositions, belies an underlying commonality. Each in their own way, the inhabitants of Mettingen believe they can achieve and ought to strive for the ascension of the mind over the body, the ethereal psyche over the sensual and corporeal form. Whether it is a rationalistic spirituality that privileges the soul over the earthly container (as with Wieland) or an aesthetic intellectuality that privileges reason and refined sensibility, over the limitations and corruptibility of the senses (as with Pleyel and, somewhat differently, with Clara), the different conceptions of the self portrayed in the novel share a common idealization of immaterial consciousness, of what may be conceptualized as a disembodied intelligence.

Enter Carwin. Trouble erupts when the ideal of disembodied intelligence is made literal by this newcomer whose talent for mimicry combined with ventriloquy enables him to produce voices (metonym for consciousnesses, souls, or minds) that seemingly exist independent of a speaking body. After his entrance upon the stage, storm clouds

(both external and internal) roil Clara's peace of mind. "Something whispered that the happiness we at present enjoyed was set on mutable foundations," she laments (54). Indeed, the illusion of unmediated access to transcendent truth precipitates an "uproar of the elements" in which the basic constituents of the group's physical and symbolic realities quickly lose their stability and their coherence. In ways both figurative and literal, the seemingly solid grounds of their belief open up beneath their feet, the light of truth flares into infernal delusions, and their picturesque stream echoes with their darkest fears and desires. The once immutable verities of Mettingen, the assumption of their virtue and integrity as individuals and as a group and the belief that the future held only happiness, all devolve into terror, cruelty, and death.

Worse yet is that the near obliteration of their world is born of a dynamic of attempted and failed self-perpetuation. In their construction of meaning—the way in which they both construe and create their reality—is a pattern of repetition and amplification in which a characteristic certitude becomes more pronounced until it attains a palpable and grotesque materiality. This dynamic, I argue, is best understood in terms of a feature of the narrative that has still more to yield to critical attention: its irregular sexuality.

"A Different Sex"

In his biography of Brown, William Dunlap offers this description of one of his friend's most memorable creations: "The great cause of all the evils, which befall Wieland and his family, Carwin the biloquist, is a character approaching to the sublime, from the mystery thrown around him, and yet at times inspiring sentiments of disgust, and even contempt" (15). Although Dunlap's attribution of the "great cause of all the

evils" is misleading, if not outright wrong—Carwin's presence and his vocal trickery do not directly cause but rather occasion the implosion of the enlightened yet insular circle at Mettingen—, the description does capture something of the effect the character has on the Wieland group and on readers. Carwin's mysterious otherness calls up something like the awe and astonishment of the sublime; but instead of self-ennobling feelings, like those inspired by external grandeur or displays of terrible power, characters and readers who encounter the itinerant illusionist experience the strange and disabling sensation of being fascinated by the repulsive. Notably the only character in the narrative given any physical description, Carwin is marked by both his seemingly otherworldly ability to transcend material trappings and physical laws and by his undeniably ugly corporeality. That is, more than simply a challenge to the group's systems of thought, Carwin's sensational deceptions and his non-normative physical being are provocations of their embodied selves. One might say, in keeping with the novel's recurring image of light and combustion, that he provides the spark that ignites the Mettingenites' volatile carnality.

Upon his first introduction in the narrative, the enigmatic stranger arouses an intellectual curiosity, but also a vague unease and, significantly, an erotic fascination. Seen from a distance traversing and apparently savoring the grandeur of Mettingen, Carwin, in the garb of a country bumpkin, draws the notice of Clara, who studies him "with more than ordinary attention" for reasons she knows not why and lingers on his image long after he is gone from view (50-1). The cut, material, and fit of his clothes, the dust on his shoes, as well as the proportions of his frame and the character of his gait come under her gaze; but not recognizing the nature of her unusual interest in him she

intellectualizes on "the alliance which commonly subsists between ignorance and the practice of agriculture" (51). Although she reduces the man to a type, an object of contemplation, his unusual hold on her attention calls into question just who is the subject and who the object. Her musings, too, express a combination of condescension and infatuation. For as she indulges in (or submits to) "airy speculations as to the influence of progressive knowledge in dissolving this alliance, and embodying the dreams of the poets," she is formulating her ideal man in the image of this rustic farmer of refined sensibilities. (It is an ideal, we might note, drawn also from that gentleman farmer, her much-admired brother.)

This ambiguous reverie serves as prelude to that which she "count[s] among the most extraordinary incidents of [her] life" (53). When half an hour later a visitor at the door accosts Clara's maid with what may be a veiled sexual solicitation, Clara overhears the dialogue from another room.[80] The stranger's words, though pregnant with obscure meanings, are noted merely as "somewhat singular," while the tones and the manner of their delivery, Clara confesses, have a strong effect on her. Her initial "involuntary and incontrollable" response to his oratorical display—she "mechanically" and symbolically drops her cloth, she feels an overflowing from her heart and eyes—blurs the line between the effects of the sublime and the tokens of a sexual arousal. Her inability to see the owner of the powerfully affecting voice heightens her awareness of the body hidden from sight; and as she listens, her fancy conjures up a "form, and attitude, and garb worthy to accompany such elocution" (52). The body's absence serves to make it all the more present to her consciousness, but only as an imagined extension of or lucid index to the

orator's character and intellect; she expects the material form to faithfully express the masterful mentality.

Her fantasy, however, is short-lived; and her faith in the revelations of natural language as with so many other expectations, conjectures, and assumptions in this narrative, is exposed and exploded. When the two unexpectedly meet moments later, she is stunned by the speaker's "inverted cone" of a face, his gangly physique, and his uncouth attire. In a sudden reverse, Carwin's clothing, body, and physiognomy—deviating far from standards of correctness and "wide of beauty"—challenge the normative ideas of embodiment, of the connection between physical being and immaterial identity (53).[81] His problematic physicality stymies her habitual attempt to read outward appearances as more or less faithful indices of some meaning beyond. She seems forced instead to look at, not through him. Indeed, for a time she seems unable to do anything other than fixate on the image of him in her mind's eye. The transports of the sublime give way to the incapacitation of the grotesque.

But the conscious self will not abide the sense of powerlessness and uncertainty for long. It is in keeping with her sensibilities that, not knowing what else to do with these incongruous thoughts and feelings triggered by him, Clara turns the stranger into an art object, putting a psychological distance between herself and the stranger by spending the rest of the day meticulously drawing his likeness, aestheticizing his fascinating otherness.[82] In admiring the resulting composition as "unexceptionable," she, in effect, momentarily transforms the unnerving experience into an occasion for self-satisfaction (53). However, this reassertion of reason's sovereignty over her ungovernable affectivity

falters as she becomes absorbed by the image she has composed. In what serves as a kind of veiled confession of her sexual attraction, Clara demurs,

> I can account for my devotion to this image no otherwise, than by supposing that its properties were rare and prodigious. Perhaps you will suspect that such were the first inroads of a passion incident to every female heart, and which frequently gains a footing by means even more slight, and more improbable than these. I shall not controvert the reasonableness of the suspicion, but leave you at liberty to draw, from my narrative, what conclusions you please. (54)

The (probably) unintended pun in the last sentence calls attention to the way in which her drawing serves to satisfy her need for—if not meaning, then—a sense of closure or containment.

And yet the experience of stormy passions, externally realized in the torrential rain and echoing thunder outside, leaves her rattled. The encounter with Carwin has shaken her faith in a grounded, orderly, and benevolent universe. In her mind, she dwells upon the images of her brother and his children in vain, as the thought of them only increases her dread of "the uncertainty of life" (55). Thoughts of death flow as if quite naturally from her erotic reverie. And in a clever bit of plotting, her thoughts seem to materialize again (in the form of one of Carwin's ruses) into actual menaces of murder in a scene in which voices from her closet can be overheard arguing over how best to murder her. This linking of sexual desire and death becomes a recurring theme in her narrative. Later, when her physical longings again threaten to overturn her rational self-possession, when Pleyel's unexpected absence tempts her to flaunt convention and

declare her love openly, Clara further develops her association of erotic passion with not only desire and suffering (the two senses of the word) but, indeed, with a kind of death wish. She comes to blame the "hateful and degrading impulses which had lately controuled me" for making her mind "the victim of [. . .] imbecility." It is an imbecility, she reflects, that may have been "coeval with the first inroads of a fatal passion; a passion that will never rank me in the number of its eulogists; it was alone sufficient to the extermination of my peace: it was itself a plenteous source of calamity, and needed not the concurrence of other evils to take away the attractions of existence, and dig for me an untimely grave" (83). Thus, again her mind moves from the consciousness of ungovernable desires to the indignities and liabilities of embodied existence. As she puts it, "the state of my mind naturally introduced a train of reflections upon the dangers and cares which inevitably beset an human being. By no violent transition was I led to ponder on the turbulent life and mysterious end of my father" (83).

She is not alone in equating the loss of reason's sovereignty over the body's passions with the end of life as she knows and values it, that is, with the end of her identity. Neither is she alone in her active response to this existential threat. Aware of and appalled at the disunity of her own thoughts, she seeks out some touchstone, a confirmation of an absolute truth and a true language. Unable to sleep, Clara seeks solace in reconnecting with her father through his memoirs. To her mind this manuscript, "by no means recommended by its eloquence," is a kind of artless text with an "unaffected and picturesque simplicity" that thereby faithfully transmits a "most useful" understanding of "human manners and passions" (83). Clara's sublimation of her unsettling sensuality, of bodily desires and aversions, into an ostensibly virtuous

sensibility—one yearning to discern and embrace transcendent truth, beauty, and goodness—will find echoes in the psychologies of each of the other major characters. So too will its consequent failure.

At Mettingen, corporeality, that is, the material self and its connection to the physical world through its needs, its urges, its susceptibilities to influence, appears (conspicuous in its concealment) in the form of a muted, denied, and refracted sexuality. Each member of the group manifests a desire to exercise sovereignty over the sexual body, to be independent of the social and biological constraints and compulsions of gendered embodiment, to be, finally, what the phantom voice seems to be and what Carwin claims he can be: "of a different sex" (205). Explaining how he could have extraordinary, seemingly supernatural insight into her private world, Carwin boasts to Clara, "I was of a different sex. I was not your husband; I was not even your friend; yet my knowledge of you was of that kind, which conjugal intimacies can give, and, in some respects, more accurate" (205). Such a one, it seems, may be privy to knowledge of the other without being exposed to the messiness of mutual intimacy, to the vulnerabilities and obligations of relationships and the rules of propriety, or to the emotional and biological consequences of carnal knowledge. With disembodied being comes not only freedom from the pangs and privations of passion, but the quasi-divine power to peer unobserved into the private lives of others.

Over the course of the narrative, each character seeks out this kind of power, the power to penetrate the "inmost soul" of another while retaining the integrity of the self, to feel like the observer of sublimities, taking in awful grandeur while secure in her (emotional) distance. And each engages in ethically suspect, if not altogether criminal

activities to gain such knowledge of the other while avoiding the risk of self-exposure inherent in face-to-face encounters. Carwin, of course, through his extraordinary skills, manipulates the Wieland group while remaining invisible, leading to disastrous and unanticipated results. But his double-tongued doings call out the group's own deceptions and duplicities. Under cover of curiosity or even benevolent concern, the other major characters justify transgressions like eavesdropping, reading private journals, and otherwise gathering intelligence through means indirect and less-than-forthright. Carwin himself is the object of much surreptitious scrutiny: the members of the Mettingen circle formulate conjectures; they analyze his looks and behaviors; and when in his presence they try to obliquely coax disclosures from him. When these efforts fail, his hosts choose not to force the issue, for, as Clara explains, "If the disclosure was productive of pain or disgrace, it was inhuman to extort it" (73). But in matters of the heart, one does not give in to such scruples so easily. Nurturing a secret romantic fantasy formulated along gendered rules of propriety, Clara considers how best to manipulate Pleyel into disclosing his hidden feelings for her while confiding her own amorous feelings for him only to a journal, which she keeps locked in a drawer and encoded in a short-hand of her own devising. Reflecting on this behavior, the historian Clara mournfully intones, "My errors have taught me thus much wisdom; that those sentiments we ought not to disclose, it is criminal to harbor" (80). And yet even this seemingly more mature expression of the injustice of insincerity seems of only limited validity given the narrative's repeated demonstrations that one's self-knowledge is partial, in both senses. For his part, Henry Pleyel has been hiding his own passionate obsession behind a mask of insouciance and self-possession. But when the biloquist performs an impromptu dialogue calculated to pit

Pleyel's rationality against his secret adoration, a dialogue that grotesquely realizes Clara's figurative criminality, these hypocrisies and his own erupt into the open.

Rushing to warn Clara of Carwin's status as a wanted thief and murderer, he suddenly stops to listen to a whispered drama in the bushes. What this secret admirer overhears at the recess by the river is true to his beloved's form, that is, to the sound of her voice; but it is shockingly incongruous in its content. The tones, the laugh, and some "general sentiments" are hers, but the salacious tenor of her dialogue stands in striking contrast to what he formerly believed to be her high standards of truth and decency (210). Despite his avowed reliance on disinterested reason, the "man of cold reserves and exquisite sagacity" accepts the conclusion that accords not with cool logic but panders to his hidden, half-strangled fear and desire regarding Clara (210). By descending into "a cavity beside the building," Pleyel, not for the first time, turns aside from direct intercourse with the dreaded object of his desire (133). In effect, Carwin's machinations serve to make more overt Pleyel's long-standing secret surveillance of Clara. In a way not unlike Clara's artistic response to the troublesome stirrings evoked by Carwin, Pleyel has been refracting his desires into an aesthetic-intellectual project, cataloguing in his journal every aspect of her being down to the color of her shoes and the arrangement of her toilet, so as not to "omit the slightest shade, or the most petty line in [her] portrait." "I was desirous that others should profit by an example so rare," he explains (122). But this deist has more in mind than selflessly redirecting personal longings into a religious devotion to his divinity, reason. In addition to holding up this sublunary saint as a model for the world, he had "another and more interesting object in view" (123). In the heat of his diatribe against her, he admits to Clara, without any apparent reservation, his one-time

intention of transforming his fiancé, the baroness Theresa de Stolberg, into a copy of her, calling upon the woman "as she wished to secure and enhance my esteem, to mould her thoughts, her words, her countenance, her actions, by this pattern" (123). If the eminently rational man cannot possess this "union between intellect and form, which has hitherto existed only in the conceptions of the poet" (121), then he can at least strive to make the unattainable incarnate in the Saxon lady who holds a prior claim to his tenderness. But with the revelation of the clandestine rendezvous, the disgusted Pleyel renounces Clara, both to her face and to her brother, as "the most profligate of women" (104). Her protestations of innocence and appeals to his reason notwithstanding, he decides to leave immediately and for good.

This subplot's focus on the loss of romantic hopes and the ruin of reputation seems trivial next to the disasters yet to come; but, in fact, the incident is inextricable from the main plot's chain of events and from the complex moral of the story. Once again thoughts strain toward material being and metaphor toward literality. Pleyel's "murderous invectives," as Clara styles them, will become embodied in Wieland's actual murders (139). In concrete terms, his accusation and Clara's attempted refutation set the scene for the killing spree, calling Wieland out into the night and to the deserted place in which he will have his mystic vision. But on the thematic level, one can see that the obsessive behavior exhibited by Pleyel, his search for communion with the poets' ideal made flesh, will reverberate with his friend's driving compulsion to be admitted into the physical presence of God. And both pursue their eidolons through the person of Clara, who, like the tragic heroine of Gottfried Burger's ballad of the specter bridegroom (to which Clara alludes just after her first erotic experience), heedlessly seeks to embrace her

own phantom lover (55). In Clara's case, the impossible consummation she desires, and for the sake of which she courts death, is not that of a bride and groom or of a wanton and her paramour, but that of a sister and a brother.

"Monstrous Conception"

What has often been noted but rarely given extensive analysis is the dynamic of incest in the narrative.[83] The fact and nature of Clara's fears and desires regarding her brother Theodore emerge in the dream of the pit. After falling asleep at the latticed shelter in the recess of the riverbank, she dreams she is walking to her brother's house at twilight. "A pit, methought, had been dug in the path I had taken, of which I was not aware," she recalls (62). Her being simultaneously the knowing *me* and the oblivious *I* manifests her double consciousness, embodying her sense of desire and of her (possibly willful) ignorance. When she sees her brother "beckoning her and calling [her] to make haste" from the far side, she hurries ahead; but just before she takes a plunge into the abyss, an arm grabs her from behind while a voice exclaims "Hold! Hold!" (62). Is Wieland luring her to her death? Is he inviting her to follow him into madness? Critics differ in their interpretations; this being a dream, it not surprisingly yields multiple meanings.[84] But Clara explicitly draws parallels between this dream and a subsequent scene over which hangs not only death and madness, but also, and most immediately, a conflicted sexuality.

In a previous incident Clara fled her house in panic upon hearing what seemed to be a whispered conspiracy to murder her carried on between two ruffians hiding in her bedroom closet. But on another occasion, subsequent to her erotically-charged encounter with Carwin and to the dream of the pit, her behavior is quite different. After rising to

retrieve her father's journal, she suddenly senses the presence of someone in that same closet. She is again alone and defenseless; and yet despite a recurrence of the terrified disembodied voice exclaiming those same words of warning "Hold! Hold!" she fails to flee. In fact, after collecting herself, she resumes her steps toward the door. But while her body is moving as if by mechanical impulse, her mind marks "the similitude existing between these incidents and those of my dream"; it marks, that is, the resemblance of the voice, the words, and the "war" between her "actions and persuasions" (86). Interpreting the dream as an omen (in other words, seeing the language of images come into material being), she is quickly convinced she knows both who lies in wait for her and why. Questions race through her mind: "What minister or implement of ill was shut up in this recess? Who was it whose suffocating grasp I was to feel, should I dare to enter it? What monstrous conception is this?" But they serve only to introduce the foregone conclusion: "my brother!" (87).

The form her understanding takes says much; it is grotesque. Like her larger narrative, the phrase *monstrous conception* carries within it coexisting yet seemingly contradictory meanings. It seems at first glance to simply denote the terrifying and irrational nature of the thought that her brother is the intruder shut up in her closet. And yet, the coupling of the terms *monstrous* and *conception* evokes a biological phenomenon analogous to her state of mind. Clara's characterization of the conception as monstrous signals an awareness on some level of the incestuous overtones of her and her brother's relationship, its potential for conceiving in-bred monsters, a term once used to denote severely deformed offspring. Connecting both of these ideas in dizzying circuitry, the

phrase also conveys her repugnance, her abjection of that conception, the union of brother and sister, as illegitimate, as a terrible transgression of accepted standards.

And yet her actions are those of one welcoming her fate. Now actively reifying her dream, she again takes the role of the victim and the victimizer, the beckoner and the beckoned. Certain of the identity of the intruder in the closet—she is both the asker of questions and the giver of answers in her sort of incestuous internal intercourse—she again places her hand on the lock; and with no means, indeed, no intent to stop her assailant's designs, she tries to open the door. When the door does not yield to her pulling, the first confirmation that someone lies within, she exerts all her force to open it, thereby becoming the aggressor countering the ravisher's resistance. Describing these actions as having been "dictated by phrenzy," and not, she explicitly notes, by any laudable strength of mind, she in effect denies responsibility for behavior that even she acknowledges seems suicidal. "Sacred duty combined with every spontaneous sentiment to endear me to my being," she assures her reader before asking, "Why then did I again approach the closet and withdraw the bolt?" (87).

If, as she believes, Wieland waits to destroy her, Clara's behavior suggests something irresistibly compelling about "relinquish[ing]" her being to her brother (87). Her initial impetus to open the closet was to read her father's manuscript. Perhaps, we might see her otherwise unaccountable actions as manifesting not a death wish, per se, or even a strictly sexual fantasy, but a manifestation of a wish to return to the undifferentiated state of being, that expanded sphere of self, "the house and name of Wieland," now threatened by her passing through her sexual awakening into adulthood (151).[85] In the passage immediately preceding this incident she had already complained

of the evils of irrational passion, of its taking away "the attractions of existence." Now apparently under its sway, she finds herself unable to conform to the era's philosophical imperative to obey the dictates of reason and moral sensibility, much as her father failed to carry out his God's injunction. Although she venerates the man, his death serves as a cautionary tale. The fantasy of a union with her brother, though terrifying, seems to represent the alternative (albeit a narcissistic one) to fully engaging the chaotic indeterminacy introduced into her world in the form of Carwin, he who "afforded [. . .] no ground on which to build even a plausible conjecture" (72). But beyond illustrating the identity crisis of an individual meeting the outside world for the first time, Brown's treatment of Clara's individuation, bound up as it is with profound epistemological and moral uncertainty, speaks more broadly about the very ground of existence and meaning, and of her and her brother's desperate need to examine and verify that ground.

"To Love with a Passion More Than Fraternal"

While Wieland, as the accused murderer, does offer an account of his reasons for going to his sister's house at that late hour on the night of the massacre, he fails to inform his auditors of the wider circumstances. Not explicitly noted in the court transcript is the fact that Wieland's sudden transformation into parricide occurs on the very day Henry Pleyel brings to him his report of the overheard dialogue at the recess. As recounted to his sister, Wieland's response to Pleyel's report that morning, at the time he received it, seems eminently reasonable, being both open-minded toward his friend's earnest account of what was heard and guardedly skeptical given the history of his sister's actions and sentiments. However, despite his coolly rational demeanor, when later that same day

Clara does not appear for her promised overnight visit, hints of a deep, unsettling concern emerge.[86]

Telling the court of his errand into the night to learn the reason for Clara's absence, Wieland positively affirms his lack of anxiety: "My mind was contemplative and calm; not wholly devoid of apprehension on account of my sister's safety. Recent events, not easily explained, had suggested the existence of some danger; but this danger was without a distinct form in our imagination, and scarcely ruffled our tranquility" (166). But this equanimity seems extraordinary given that what he dismisses as "recent events, not easily explained" includes not only a series of mysterious voices, but also the overheard threat of rape and murder that sent the hysterical Clara running to and finally collapsing unconscious at her brother's door. Nor does the unresolved issue of Pleyel's outrageous allegations against Clara merit a mention. Instead, he tells the courtroom, "On my way my mind was full of those ideas which related to my intellectual condition" (166). His "intellectual condition," as he has explained, is that of one whose tireless research into the true will of God has revealed to him only the limitations of merely human understanding unaided by "direct communication": "I solicited direction: I turned on every side where glimmerings of light could be discovered. I have not been wholly uninformed; but my knowledge has always stopped short of certainty" (165). That is, admittedly, while nominally engaged in a search for his sister, it is his own well-being and his own place in the divine order upon which he is brooding.

On the fateful night, the two purposes, the search for his sister and his ongoing search for the will of God, become for him indistinguishable. One is subsumed into the other as they are each, at bottom, a search for assurance of his own metaphysical well-

being, an affirmation of his self-image. For Wieland as for Pleyel, Clara has become a stand-in for the transcendent completeness—the union with the other part of himself—that seems somehow attainable here in this realm. She is the "sister he was wont to love with a passion more than fraternal," the "angel whom [he] was wont to worship," for whose sake he was "ready to question his own senses when they plead against [her]" (185, 224, 109). His welfare and hers are self-same. "There is no human being whom I love with more tenderness, and whose welfare is nearer my heart," he tells her when she comes to refute Pleyel's accusations (109). But his sister's absence that night, in light of Pleyel's story of her having "fallen into wickedness," could not fail to cast the shadow of a doubt upon his conviction of her true character and perhaps, more fundamentally, his very understanding of selfhood (110).[87]

And just such doubt and confusion roar in his mind that night. After starting for his sister's house, Wieland recalls, he lost sight of his purpose and wandered aimlessly amid a "torrent of fervid conceptions" (166). (The phrase echoes his doomed father's complaint that his "brain was scorched to cinders" and, like his father's, prefigures, though to different effect, the "fiery stream" that will soon engulf him [14, 167]). However it may have come about, this enflamed state of mind comprises an overwhelming sense of appreciation for his conjugal and parental blessings. Casually asserting that "the series of [his] thoughts is easily traced," an allusion to the era's Lockean-inspired associative psychology, he marks the progress from joy, to gratitude, to the desire to demonstrate that gratitude to the author of his being.[88] But he leaves it to his hearers to consider the logical connection between his errand and this sudden paroxysm of these perpetual feelings, which unaccountably recurred with such "unusual energy" at

that particular moment (166). His thoughts, we note, are on that in which he has his being; his personal identity, as he reminds the courtroom auditors, is that of a husband, a father, and a friend. Behind the gush of good feelings is a desperate clinging onto that which he feels to be slipping away, his sense of self.

In the agony of devotion, he is moved to utter aloud a prayer that he may be shown an "unambiguous token" of God's presence. The night not answering, however, he continues on into Clara's house, up the stairs, and into her private chambers. She is not there. Both his searches have come up short. His insecurity might be thought to be reaching a climax. Then suddenly, and not coincidentally, his looked-for divine instructions come to him just as he is leaving Clara's bedroom, whose emptiness at that hour further supports the possibility that Pleyel's accusations were accurate and that his sister may be even then hastening to some illicit assignation. We are not told whether this doubt (or any other thought regarding her) rose to his consciousness only that the fateful epiphany bursts upon him at that very moment. "I stretched out my hand to seize the balustrade by which I might regulate my steps," he explains, his physical action paralleling the metaphorical grasping for a guiding principle and direction (167). In an instant, everything around him radiates a brilliant light; and from behind booms the divine and fatal pronouncement, the answer to his prayer. Having up to this moment received no sign of God's presence and having not confirmed his sister's safety and her purity, he seems to have in effect willed this extraordinary event into being.

This epiphany is the latest in a series of seemingly miraculous interventions that arrive to kindle or to reaffirm the recipient's faith in an ultimate, transcendent meaning. Just so, the elder Wieland, as an angst-ridden young apprentice in a cluttered garret,

happened to rest his wandering eye upon an open book and upon the phrase "Seek and ye shall find" (8). In the French Protestant text, Clara tells us, "the craving which had haunted him was now supplied with an object" and his life of religious devotion began (8). And Pleyel, at the point of despairing over "the inexpressible importance of unveiling the designs and character of Carwin, and the utter improbability that this ever would be effected," receives a reviving jolt (128-9). In an "act [. . .] rather mechanical than voluntary," he placed his hand on a newspaper and "threw a languid glance at the first column that presented itself," at once finding the information he so desperately desired (129). In words that prefigure the effulgent epiphany of his religiously-minded friend, Pleyel asserts, "The ideas which flowed in upon my mind, affected me like an instant transition from death to life. The purpose dearest to my heart was thus effected, at a time and by means the least of all others within in the scope of my foresight. [. . .] Here was evidence which imparted to my understanding the most luminous certainty" (129). But in this and the other examples of incidents that "approach as nearly to the nature of miracles as can be done by that which is not truly miraculous," (to borrow from Brown's preface) we see not random chance or the impersonal force of fate but the desperate meaning-making of anguished souls (3). We see also the dangerous potential of such self-generated constructions.

The palpable evidence of a supernatural order and of a mode of existence in which consciousness exists independent of the material body not only serves to validate the younger Wieland's faith in miraculous intervention, as evinced by his subsequently undertaking to write a treatise on the Dæmon of Socrates; it seems also to spur Wieland to perfect his own sublime detachment from the physical, his own "elevation above

sensual and selfish" (48, 231). And his conception of the self as a virtuous immateriality confined within a fallible, fallen materiality makes all but inevitable the outcome of Wieland's fervent pleas for a way to prove his piety. By the logic of this worldview, the voice he hears, in effect, could only demand that he manifest his virtue and devotion by sacrificing his most precious earthly attachments. Specifically, to accomplish his quest for perfect communion, he must kill his wife, whom he calls God's "last and best gift"; and he must do so there at that spot (172). Not without a great struggle does he accept the decree as irrevocable and unalterable. Yet, after the deed is done, he sees his murder of Catharine as a triumph over the weaknesses of the flesh, as his having "successfully subdued the stubbornness of human passions" and having "soared above frailty" (172).[89] But as the narrative reveals, his act is simultaneously a disavowal of and a gluttonous indulgence in self-directed desires.

"Call her hither, and here let her fall," the being spoke (168). But this is Brown's own invention, a detail not derived from the Yates account. And there is nothing arbitrary about the specifics of the decree. The change of setting for the wife's death places the event against a background of Clara's private inner world and her emergent sexuality. For even after he drags Catharine back to the entry way of Clara's house, Wieland finds he can only work up to the deed once he has drawn his victim into his sister's bedroom. And when Catharine's struggles end and he finally relinquishes the exterminating grasp, he places the sacrificial corpse in his sister's bed. This suggestive detail, too, springs from the novelist's mind and not from the source material, raising the question of its meaning or purpose.

Following this trail one notices that Wieland's account of his motives and actions proves to be rather less straightforward than at first it seems and more like the "mazy paths" referenced in the novel's epigraph. Despite Wieland's show of fearless candor in depicting his state of mind, the succession of his thoughts and feelings, and apparently every one of his movements, his narrative of the fateful night is missing something. Recall that when Clara discovered her sister-in-law's corpse in the immediate aftermath of the murder, she reacted with horror to visible signs of not only strangulation but also of "an evil" that preceded her death, a "violation" suffered while under "a suffocating and polluting grasp" (150). However, in his address to the courtroom, Wieland, though not sparing in his description of Catharine's pathetic cries and ghastly convulsions, gives no hint that before (or while) strangling his wife to death he also raped her.

Whether Wieland's bloody sacrifice is prompted by Carwin, God, insanity, or "hellish illusions" is a question left unanswered (187). Yet its primary object and its execution, as the novel strongly implies, are informed by a desire carnal in its expression and deeply, ruinously narcissistic at its core. When Clara assumes that she and not Catharine was the intended target of "violation and death," she touches upon a truth darker than she knows. The malleable Catharine, Clara's intimate companion since childhood, corresponding in age and temper, partaker of all Clara's thoughts, cares and wishes, has performed her last as Clara's double.

"Begotten Upon Selfishness"

Wieland understands his murder of Catharine as a religious sacrifice, a demonstration of "perfect virtue and the extinction of selfishness and error" (176). But it is his very self-love that drives his mania. His conviction that he is driven by a righteous

desire to know God's will and to perform his duty selflessly is, ironically, a source of immeasurable pride. As Dr. Cambridge explains,

> He conceives himself to have reached a loftier degree of virtue, than any other human being. The merit of his sacrifice is only enhanced in the eyes of superior beings, by the detestation that pursues him here, and the sufferings to which he is condemned. The belief that even his sister has deserted him, and gone over to his enemies, adds to his sublimity of feeling, and his confidence in divine approbation and future recompense. (186-7)

In his egotistical pursuit of transcendence, perceived in and shaped by the terms common to the rhetoric of spirituality and of sensuality ("God is the object of my supreme passion," "I have burnt with ardour to approve my faith and my obedience" [165]), Wieland pushes the metaphors toward a literal enactment, in effect transforming the sublimities of ineffable mystery into the grotesqueries of paradox embodied. And for a moment, looking into the face of his dead wife, he is appalled by the metamorphosis: "Grimness and distortion took place of all that used to bewitch me into transport, and subdue me into reverence" (172). His quest for the perfect union of form and content has produced an abomination.

Wieland's is an extreme case, but there is a long history of believers blurring the line between eros and agape, that is, between sexual or romantic love and the sacrificial love of God. (The eroticism of Bernini's statue *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* comes to mind.) And Wieland's coupling of sensual desire and religious devotion was not unprecedented in Brown's eighteenth century. In fact, some minor details seem

calculated to suggest the inheritance of just such a legacy. Although the elder Wieland's religiosity appears the most consequential to his children's sensibilities, Clara notes that he did not force his beliefs on his wife. Their mother's religious practices, Clara explains, were molded on the practices "of the disciples of Zinzendorf," that is, the Moravian church (12). Here Brown is once again connecting his fictional family to historical personages. Despite its being reinforced twice in the narrative, this connection has attracted little critical notice.[90] But a closer look suggests the detail does more work than has been previously recognized.

In 1722, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf became the benefactor then leader of a reformist denomination originating in Moravia, a region in present-day Czech Republic. Under the bishopric of Zinzendorf, this remnant of an early (pre-Luther) Protestant sect that had been forced underground by the Catholic Church established communities in Upper Lusatia, now the eastern part of Germany. The Wieland family's connection to Zinzendorf is obliquely referenced in the narrative when Pleyel informs Theodore that he has an ancestral claim to large estates in this same German principality (37).[91] Also, in the early 1740s Zinzendorf traveled widely to establish missionary communities throughout the Caribbean and North America, including one just north of Philadelphia, called Bethlehem, from whence, presumably, the unnamed Wieland mother received her religious education. In hindsight, we might see that the mother's Moravian form of piety serves as the alternative model to the elder Wieland's devotion to an ultimately failed strategy of self-denial, an alternative in which personal desires, rather than suppressed until they erupt (as they do so spectacularly in the father's case), could be redirected into one's sacred duties.

Historian Paul Peucker explains that in Zinzendorf's "marriage religion" the Moravians took up the medieval idea of the mystical marriage between the believer and the divine. Medieval mystics believed "the ultimate goal of the believer, though difficult to attain, should [. . .] be to be united with the divine lover in a mystical embrace" (50). "In the 1740s," he writes, "Moravians discovered this tradition and used similar erotic language to describe this spiritual relationship," adding that "Moravians not only described the relationship between Christ and mankind with the image of marriage, they also made religion into an almost sexual experience" (50, 45). Sex between married couples was considered a sacred sacrament and a living reenactment of the coupling of the soul (figured, as in the gendered Latin form, as female) and the bridegroom Christ. Sex outside of marriage and even the relations between husband and wife that were rooted not in sacramental love but in lust were considered transgressions against God. We hear a more generalized version of this precept when Wieland asserts, "My social sentiments were indebted to their alliance with devotion for all their value. All passions are base, all joys feeble, all energies malignant, which are not drawn from this source" (166). Zinzendorf counseled the devoted to sublimate their merely personal desires, to refract them into expressions of transcendent selflessness. The aim was for a meeting of the mystical and sensual in which one might achieve through the disciplining of the worldly life a more intimate relation with God. But as Brown recognizes, and dramatizes in the actions of Wieland, Clara, and Pleyel, the quest for pure and unified being—whether undertaken in terms of religion, sensibility, or rational humanism—can all too easily be perverted toward selfish ends.

In fact, Zinzendorf was made intimately aware of this danger. However well-intended and theologically justified it may have been, the rhetorical conflation of sexuality and spirituality engendered problems both outside and inside the church. The hyper-erotic language of the church's hymns and liturgy raised eyebrows and gave ammunition to antagonistic sects and political entities. And when Zinzendorf's son, the much adored Christian Renatus, an unmarried man and minister to the choir (or cohort) of single brethren, began pushing metaphor toward literality, inspiring and inciting ecstatic displays of what we today would recognize as homoeroticism, his father the count, who had been away establishing missions, had to step in to head off scandal.[92] The incident involving Christian Renatus may or may not have been known to Brown—the church moved to contain the dissemination of such embarrassing information—but in *Wieland* we see the pattern of the son taking the parent's conceptualizations too far. The Zinzendorf connection, which insinuates the doctrine of sublimation instead of repression, may help explain why the younger Wieland was able to obey the divine command when his father failed and, more particularly, why, seemingly following his father's footsteps, he arrived not at the temple but at his sister's bedroom.

While the historical example suggests a metaphysical vulnerability, a model of Wieland's particular form of depravity may have been drawn from another source. A literary antecedent to Wieland's jealous fixation with God's favor and to the sexual grotesqueries born of it lies in a well-known work of modern Christian mythology.[93] Brown was not alone among his contemporaries in his familiarity with and high regard for John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[94] In particular, something about the early scene in Book II, the allegory of Satan, Sin, and Death, fascinated eighteenth century readers.[95] Leading

artists of the time, including William Hogarth, William Blake, and Henry Fuseli, made this scene a subject of their own artistic endeavors, helping to make the congress of this unholy trinity the era's most widely illustrated episode from Milton's epic.[96] In the passage, Milton uses the violation of the incest taboo to dramatize a more fundamental spiritual sin; through the shocking transgression of the flesh, he underscores the repugnant and ruinous evil of the narcissistic ego that in favoring itself forsakes all others—most particularly for Milton, the ultimate other, God. Exploiting the two senses of the word *conception*, the poet imagines that the moment the angel Lucifer first conceived of rebellion a loathsome daughter was brought into being, springing from his head as a "snaky sorceress" named Sin. Born only of him, she is the offspring of his deep-seated self-regard. And it is upon this creature, that is, upon his own progeny, that Satan, "enamored" with the "perfect image" of himself he viewed in her, begat Death himself (II. lines 763-7). Death in turn chased down and raped his mother, begetting the brood of monsters "hourly conceived and hourly born," who as Jean Hagstrum writes, "in another in this complex nest of parodies, provide a kind of grotesque equivalent of consanguinity by gnawing at their mother's entrails" (43).

Pleyel reiterates both the imagery and the moral of this infernal tableau, albeit through the new framework of a deistic, liberal view of human nature:

> The process by which the sympathies of nature are extinguished in our hearts, by which evil is made our good, and by which we are made susceptible of no activity but in the infliction, and no joy but in the spectacle of woes, is an obvious process. As to an alliance with evil geniuses, the power and the malice of dæmons have been a thousand times

> exemplified in human beings. There are no devils but those which are begotten upon selfishness, and reared by cunning. (131-2)

Characteristically, Pleyel speaks in terms of nature and processes, of an environmental and genealogical determinism as opposed to diabolical influence and original sin. He puts his faith in reason as a form of secular, self-administered grace, a prophylactic against selfishness, even as he undercuts that faith by signaling the possibility that reason, in the form of cunning, can be recruited for selfish purposes.

As presented in the fantastical figures of Milton's free verse, graphically portrayed by the many illustrators of this scene, and bodied forth in the grotesque realism of Brown's novel, the overweening concern for self-validation, like inbreeding, results in the conception of an ill-formed, horrific, monstrous being, that is, a moral abomination. Wieland's murder of his wife, children, and a beloved ward is a travesty of the faithful devotion of Abraham, which he enacts with the self-directed lust of Satan. His killing of these earthly treasures neither eliminates nor sublimates his material and sensual hungers, but only refracts and transforms them into impious carnage.[97]

But having gone thus far, he appears unwilling or unable to acknowledge the perversity of this mindset. After the revelation of Carwin's powers of deception, he moves even more inward, as he denies the irreducible otherness of all around him, subsuming them into a master narrative of God's cosmic schemes for his (Wieland's) salvation. In the end, all that is left is to take his denial of the selfish and sensual, this grasping for his ideal identity, to its logical extreme, albeit still not without a type of sexualized gratification. In an act of self-penetration, he thrusts his sister's penknife—fittingly, a tool of authorship and a phallic weapon of authority—into his neck and dies.

"Phantastical Incongruities"

With Wieland's death, Clara plunges into bottomless despair, indifferent to Carwin's guilt, and morbidly determined to remain in her home and feed on her misery just long enough to finish the task of composing this memoir. But the narrative does not end here. A second letter, a sort of epilogue, relates Clara's unexpected return to life and takes up the lost thread of a neglected subplot. This last chapter, widely lamented by literary critics, affords Clara, now a reborn disciple of reason, the opportunity to moralize on these disasters.

The time between the writing of the first letter and the second effects a drastic change in Clara. When she had first learned of Wieland's responsibility for the massacre, Clara strained to make sense of it by attributing all to the evil agency of Carwin. But as narrative strategies for containing and explaining fail her, even the Gothic strategy of failure, Clara faced a prospect even more terrifying than that of death at the hands of a monster. She feared becoming a grotesque monster herself, something beyond the constructs of reason, beyond moral order, and beyond even language:

> Now was I stupefied with tenfold wonder in contemplating myself. Was I not likewise transformed from rational and human into a creature of nameless and fearful attributes? Was I not transported to the brink of the same abyss? Ere a new day should come, my hands might be embrued in blood, and my remaining life be consigned to a dungeon and chains. (179-80)

Here and throughout the narrative, the recurring images of abysses, pits, and "gulphs" graphically convey the group's existential dread of the loss of that absolute truth, that

ground of reality upon which all their knowledge, their conjectures, and their being is built. Moreover, Clara's mind repeatedly conjures tempests, raging volcanoes, and merciless waves, the obliterating forces of elemental chaos suggestive of the tortures of existence in a universe without a single, stable, knowable center.[98] Another of her dreams bodies forth this fear of self-disintegration, her fear of falling into that abyss of oblivion. In the aftermath of her brother's suicide, lying in her house alone, after having vehemently even violently refused to be led away, she dreams of her body being tossed about amid "phantastical incongruities," or "abortive creations," in which appear successively the men who represent different schemes of truth, different grounds of identity: her uncle Thomas Cambridge, Wieland, Pleyel, and Carwin. But in what seems a final miraculous intervention, she is pulled out of this nightmare. Again thought turns to event as the flames of volcanic chaos become a real-life inferno: her house is engulfed by a fire rising from the cellar. That is, from a space down below and deep within, the palpable flames of her father's body, the fiery stream of her brother's vision return in yet another form of internal combustion.

But Clara avoids the fate of her kinsmen, succumbing neither to horrific death nor to homicidal madness and imprisonment. Her salvation, however, is due only to the intervention of another. Drawn by the sight of the flames, witnesses race to the house. As she moved confusedly through the burning house, as in the dream of the pit, Clara admits, "I was unable to think or act for my own preservation; I was incapable, indeed, of comprehending my danger" (236). And just as an unspecified "someone" snatched her from the edge of the abyss, a nameless, faceless person identified only as "a pair of sinewy arms" takes her out of her almost self-willed immolation (236). This mysterious

other, possibly Carwin, is never identified; his otherness is never reduced to a name or even a complete form.

Her house in ashes, and with it all that nourished her melancholy, Clara recovers her health and some degree of tranquility; and after leaving behind them the mutable foundations of Mettingen, she and her uncle, the embodiment of medico-scientific authority and rational skepticism, "set [their] feet on the shore of the ancient world" (237). When they settle in the Languedoc region of southern France, site of the bloody Albigensian crusade, the Camisard uprising, and the Manichean ideology that gave shape to the sensibilities of the elder Wieland and his son, the multi-generational story of this family, comprising a series of recurring narrative echoes, comes back to its beginning, closing in upon itself.[99] The Louisa and Jane Conway (Stuart) subplot remains to protrude awkwardly out of the narrative. But when Clara and Pleyel marry after the death of Pleyel's wife and child on the birthing bed, their union serves as an emblem of the survivors' self-protective retreat into a sterile rationalism. And wielding that cool, confident logic, Clara, committed again to the idea of a centered universe, neatly folds the tale of the Stuarts, together with her own family's disaster, into the generic confines of a melodrama. She blames all on external threats suffered by the undisciplined mind to gain access into the individual's interior life where they will turn the will of the virtuous against them. But note the subtle grammatical shift in the phrase centered on her part in these events; the agency belongs not to her but to one who failed to adequately supply her "with ordinary foresight and equanimity" (244). In her facile didacticism, Clara exemplifies the age-old yearning for an absolute truth and, more particularly, the modern subject's misguided faith in the transcendent power of self-knowledge and self-mastery.

Interlude: Annus Mirabiles / Horribiles

In 1798, with the partially completed manuscript of *Wieland* in hand, Charles Brockden Brown rejoined friends William Johnson and Elihu Hubbard Smith in New York City on July 3. After years of extended visits, he finally moved into their apartment at 45 Pine Street, with a view toward living the life of a professional man of letters and cosmopolitan devotee of reason, sensibility, benevolence, civility, discernment, and taste. There he would dedicate his every waking hour to reading, going to the theater (even once attending a theatrical performance of a ventriloquist), walking along the Battery, paying visits to an extended circle of acquaintances, attending the Saturday night meetings of the Friendly Club with the roommates, and writing, always writing. It had been five years since he left his apprenticeship at the law office of Alexander Wilcocks with a strong distaste for what one *Ormond* character calls "the rubbish of the law" and a growing hunger for literary glory. But when sometime around 1793, against the advice of friends and the wishes of his family, he officially began his pursuit of a literary life, there came only a long stretch of grand plans, experiments, and well-begun projects with no finished works and no publications. During his time as a lawyer-in-training, he had seen a dozen of his rather conventional poems printed in newspapers.[100] And in his correspondence with his friends, he found a forum for literary experimentation; that is, he would engage in fictional conceits in which he would write from some far-off locale about adventures he never had and would express sentiments often extravagant and probably put on. The Henrietta Letters and the Godolphin Letters were even thought by one Brown biographer to be a genuine correspondence.[101] Then beginning in February 1798, James Watters's *Weekly Magazine* (Philadelphia) began featuring dozens of pieces

by Brown, including serialized fiction, book reviews, and essays of cultural criticism, beginning with two on the theater and its effects on society. He submitted to Watters the first parts of his dialogue "The Rights of Woman" which would be published in book form as *Alcuin*. He left with him also the manuscript of his first completed novel, an excerpt of which appeared in the *Weekly Magazine* along with the announcement that *Sky-Walk; or, The Man Unknown to Himself* would soon be published. Around this time, his brief romance with one Susan Potts ended because neither had money enough for a union and because his family disapproved of a match with a non-Quaker. Brown was then and had been for some time presumably living off of the indulgence of his family as he struggled to find his place.

Now, however, among his friends in New York, it was a time of intellectual and artistic camaraderie, an all-too-fleeting moment of triumph, optimism, and confidence. In a jointly-written letter from Brown, Johnson, and Smith to their friend William Dunlap in early September, Johnson happily reports,

> Charles feels all the joy and parental exultation of an Author having this day, been delivered, by the aid of H Caritat & T & J Swords of an handsome duodecimo, the offspring of that fertile brain which already engendered, two more volumes. This borders upon the *prodigious*!—300 pages in a month! Yet he is neither in a delirium or a fever! What an admirable antidote is philosophy! (Letters 418)

The imagery of a "prodigious" offspring born from the author's "fertile brain" is striking, especially, of course, to this reader. But for all the resonance of Johnson's word choice with the above reading of *Wieland*, what is most striking, for all who know what is to

follow, is the tone of celebration and more particularly the bidding defiance to death. *Wieland* would be published on the fourteenth of September. Five days later Elihu Hubbard Smith, at age 27, was dead.

Weeks before, sometime around the end of August, an outbreak of yellow fever, by now an annual occurrence in port cities, had begun sweeping New York; and Brown's friend and new roommate Smith had been busily tending to the sick and dying of Manhattan even as other physicians were among those claimed by the disease. In fact, hearing that one such fellow practitioner was ill and alone at a coffee house, the young doctor sought out, took home, and personally tended to Giambattista "Joseph" Scandella. Dr. Scandella, a noted Italian physician, scientist, and recently-inducted member of the American Philosophical Society, had left his adopted home of Philadelphia days before.

As it happens, Scandella had been attempting to flee another kind of toxic atmosphere.[102] The summer that ended with the rapidly spreading hemorrhagic fever began with a sharp increase in public anxiety over the real or imagined presence of foreign agents working to corrupt the body politic. Recent developments had excited fears of a coming war with France. And some prominent voices, informed by alarmist publications on the subversive schemes of a secret international organization, the Illuminati, warned of attacks from within by carriers and disseminators of radical doctrines. Despite the distinguished Italian doctor's acquaintance with the likes of George Washington and Benjamin Rush, that summer's overheated air of suspicion, culminating in President Adams' signing of the Alien and Sedition Acts, made for an inhospitable climate for those like himself: foreigners with libertarian and radical views. Scandella had been on his way to New York City to seek passage back to Europe when

he contracted the mosquito-borne disease in the swamps of New Jersey. Smith's heroic efforts notwithstanding, Scandella died in the Pine Street apartment on the seventeenth. His would-be rescuer, by this time, having also fallen under the fever's malignant sway had been confined to bed; and, after two days more of rapidly deteriorating health—victims typically suffered fevers, terrible aches, jaundiced skin, and bleeding from the nose and gums—Smith, as Dunlap would later write, "saw the last symptom of the disease, black vomit, pronounced the word 'decomposition' and died" (*Life* II. 8). Brown, meanwhile, also showing some of the early signs of infection and facing the prospect of an equally horrible fate, had been taken away to the house of another physician friend. He wrote to his brother of the news: "The die is cast. E. H. S. is dead. O the folly of prediction and the vanity of systems" (*Letters* 435).

Over two thousand New Yorkers died of the fever that summer and early fall.[103] Brown, possibly having obtained life-long immunity after a non-fatal bout during the 1793 outbreak in Philadelphia, would recover enough in a few days' time to travel out of the pestilential city. Along with Johnson, Brown took the half-day journey to Perth Amboy, New Jersey, to the country home of Dunlap's family. And in a letter written after his arrival, Brown assures his brother James that the best course of treatment for him is to be in the company of friends, now bound closer together in their "sacred fellowship" for their shared loss (*Letters* 440).

It was Smith who arranged for *Alcuin* (1798) to be published, perhaps even without Brown's knowledge. And it was Smith who had brought the manuscript of *Wieland* to its future publisher Caritat. Moreover, it was through his association with Smith and his circle that Brown graduated from a bookish dreamer to a highly informed,

actively engaged, and productive public intellectual, one truly capable of the kind of expansive critical thinking many current critics ascribe to him and his writings. But now, just as Brown's career as a professional man of letters was getting under way, the enabler, the critic, the task-master was gone.

While convalescing in the "enjoyment of the purest air and wholesome exercise" amid the "the odors and the sprightly atmosphere of this village," Brown put on hold two novelistic projects: the *Memoirs of Carwin*, a prequel of sorts to *Wieland,* and *Stephen Calvert* (*Letters* 441). And according to Sidney Krause, he likely did not begin work on what would be his next published novel until after his return to New York around mid-November.[104] Once started, however, he would attack the writing project like a man possessed, completing *Ormond; or, The Secret Witness* in six weeks. In it Brown turns real life into a romance, or perhaps simply recognizes it as such.

Chapter 3: Spectators, Spectacle, and Speculation: Picturing Reality in *Ormond*

The interpenetration of the real and the fictitious Brown takes as his method and his subject matter in *Ormond: or, The Secret Witness* (1799). The plot abounds in fraudulent fictions—disguise, forgeries, counterfeits, and other deceptive appearances—as well as voyeurism, eavesdropping, and other stratagems for piercing obscuring or illusory surfaces. And throughout all these manipulations and countermoves, a conspicuous profusion of factual content, both general circumstances and specific details, seems selected with an eye for how it reinforces the invented story's meditation on the deathless philosophical problem of separating appearance from reality.

To be sure, history was at that moment quite generous in its offering of intense and confounding perplexities. Choosing, however, not his immediate present or most recent past, Brown returned again to one particular setting that loomed large in his memory and imagination. The central plot of *Ormond*, although embedded with backstories, spans just over a year's time from the summer of 1793 into the fall of 1794. At the beginning of this period, a pestilential disease began creeping ominously through the alleys of Philadelphia, spreading death and panic in the capital of the new United States, Brown's hometown. This historic epidemic, which would claim the lives of almost five thousand in a city of about fifty thousand, features in two of Brown's previous fictions, "The Man at Home" and *Arthur Mervyn* (the first chapters of which were published serially in the summer of 1798).

In this crisis Brown found a site for exploring his intellectual and moral preoccupations. "The evils of pestilence," Brown asserts in the preface to *Arthur Mervyn*, "have already supplied new and copious materials for reflection to the physician

and the political economist. They have not been less fertile of instruction to the moral observer, to whom they have furnished new displays of the influence of human passions and motives" (3). But unlike Brown's earlier treatments of the epidemic, *Ormond* rather emphatically positions this event within its broader, global context (and implicitly, against its still unfolding consequences), thus extending the reach of his moral observations, his explorations of consciousness and conscientiousness, out beyond the solitary self, the family, the city, and the nation to address "the inextricability of human events" as they play out on the world stage (264).

In the form of a single, long manuscript composed by a friend, the novel relates the story of Constantia Dudley, offering a portrait of a young woman in 1790s Philadelphia as she confronts and ultimately overcomes a series of crises. After a con man dupes her artist-cum-apothecary father, leaving the family in economic ruin, the sixteen year old, exhibiting a prodigious rational self-control and concern for the common good, survives the trials of poverty; the loss of one parent to death and the incapacitation of the other due to despair, drunkenness, and blindness; the threat of sexual assault and of a merely mercenary marriage; as well as the depredations of the epidemic. Her resourcefulness, benevolence, and fortitude—she is "a paragon of practical republican virtue," as more than one critic has pointed out—carry her through and indeed afford her a degree of self-possession (Cahill 180).[105] They also bring her into contact with the radical freethinker, Ormond; his mistress, Helena; a transgressive revolutionary named Martinette de Beauvais; and a long-lost friend, revealed late in the novel as the story's narrator. Along the way, characters contemplate contemporary controversies regarding female education, the inequities of marriage, the artificiality of polite society,

the relation of benevolence and self-interest, and the justifications for violence. But this is only the barest outline of a narrative overflowing with incidents, interpolations, and back stories, a narrative that seems to have taken on the fragmented and disjointed character as well as the overwrought concerns of its historical moment.

In the convolutions and coincidences of this plot Brown traces the complicated links between incidents intimate and international while also exploring the imbrications of the past, present, and future. And by taking advantage of a particular historical convergence that allows him to combine into one narrative the concurrent spread of disease, of fear, and of ideology, Brown makes visible these complex and ever-changing connections—physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral—that prove the instability of boundaries, of signs and symbols, of principles and doctrines, and all means of imposing fixed meaning on the contingency of experience.

Through *Ormond*'s exhibition of the psychological and social dynamics of truth and morality, Brown discloses the limitations, liabilities, and unintended consequences of the era's understanding of how the world works; he discloses, to use his words, "the folly of prediction and the vanity of systems" (*Letters* 435). The characters' repeated failures to discern the true nature of phenomena and of other people—to descry their origins, their inner workings, their purposes or meanings, and even their status as real or fictitious—belie their supposedly superior late Enlightenment mindset. As Constantia and those around her become entangled in the epistemological and ontological difficulties of both direct experience and artistic or artful representations, *Ormond* prompts its reader into a meta-critical inquiry, a critique of critical practices. Approaches to art and to narrative, motifs featured in the incidents and imagery of the story as well as embodied in the

novel's formal structure, serve to illustrate the era's prevalent paradigms of causality, calculations of probability, and criteria for judging the true and the false. The novel's relentless resistance to resolution calls into question not merely one or another version of events or analysis of appearances but rather that which underwrites all the various operative theories and methods of reading and of representing the world, namely, an unyielding faith in and a destructive quest for certainty. Ultimately, in debunking the characters' presumption of clear-sighted discernment and predictive powers, the novel asks the reader to consider not only the efficacy but also the ethics of the characters', the author's, and his or her own means of picturing reality.

"An Authentic, and Not a Fictitious Tale"

The first inkling that all is not as it seems in *Ormond* comes in the form of a letter addressed to a mystery person. When in the opening chapter Stephen Dudley a semi-retired gentleman of leisure innocently opens and reads the seemingly misdirected letter left at his door, he quite unexpectedly catches a glimpse of what lies behind his young business partner's trusty persona. Later, shielded from view by his study's open door, Dudley secretly witnesses his protégé's odd reaction to the open envelope on the mantle. But only after the young man later feigns surprise at news of the letter's arrival does Dudley's confidence turn to suspicion. Too late, after the duplicitous Thomas Craig has absconded to the West Indies with the family's fortune, credit, and good name, Dudley learns of the con artist's elaborate deception from the meticulous records he left behind in a locked trunk, records that "perfectly explained [. . .] the part which Craig had been playing for some years, with so much success" (16).

The revelation is devastating and far from what Dudley expected. Craig's deception carried to the forging of letters from his fictitious family, letters full of sentiments of "the most appropriate simplicity and tenderness" in styles and hands "distinct and characteristical," which he shared with his master (9). The enterprising fraud even managed to circumvent Dudley's secret attempt to have a friend drop in on the family in England. And yet, the narrator observes, "Plans however skillfully contrived, if founded on imposture, cannot fail of being sometime detected" (12). As Dudley discovers, "The history of [Craig's] Wakefield family, specious and complicated as it was, was entirely fictitious" (16).

In the end, mere chance, the unlooked-for introduction of some new and incongruent information, provides the hint of what Dudley's close observation and enlightened judgment seem unable to detect. It is true that after initially dismissing the mystery letter as a simple mistake, Dudley does not fail to follow up on subsequent clues. However, the damage has been done; and the moral seems clear: The deceptions practiced by others are aided by distortions in our own vision, distortions arising from our ignorance, our passions, or our self-interestedness. In this case, the overweening desire to return to his beloved pencil and brush blind Dudley to the notion that Craig's complete self-abnegation just might be too good to be true. To the eye of the employer, "all his [Craig's] propensities appeared to concentre in his occupation and the promotion of his master's interest, from which he was drawn aside by no allurements of sensual or intellectual pleasure," the narrator reports. This appearance, however, takes on greater credibility from its agreement with Dudley's own desires. With Craig installed as his new partner, Dudley "flattered himself that his career which had hitherto been exempt

from any considerable impediment, would terminate in tranquility" (11). His shocking reversal of fortune, the reader learns, "was imbittered by the consciousness of his own imprudence, and by recollecting that the serpent which had stung him, was nurtured in his own bosom" (18). The bosom serpent, of course, is not only Craig, but also Dudley's own egotism. Certainly the incident should serve to put the reader on notice that his or her picture of reality, too, is susceptible to distortions and dissimulations.

In fact, the astute reader, taking this advice to heart, just might put the principle into immediate action; for this is not the first such mystery letter of the novel. Just such a letter, it too addressed to an unknown person, is of course precisely what the reader has been perusing. Just past the book's title page, a prefatory note, superscribed "To I. E. Rosenberg" and signed "S. C.," proclaims the note writer's intention to relate "the history of Constantia Dudley" and to do so "in no artificial or elaborate order, and without that harmonious congruity and luminous amplification, which might justly be displayed in a tale flowing merely from invention" (3). The novel's multi-layered play with authenticity and fictitiousness actually begins here at the very outset with this formal conceit. Just where this play leads, however, remains a matter of some critical doubt.

It was a common even trite literary device by the time Brown began writing. Many of the century's best-known, best-selling works are purely invented tales of purportedly factual events presented often in the form of letters or the recorded recollections of one or more witnesses or participants in some real-life affair. Samuel Richardson's novels set the standard here. Richardson's *Pamela* grew out of a planned letter-writing sampler that would offer models of correct grammar and style, proper etiquette, and commendable moral sentiments. Its popularity spawned innumerable

imitations (and a few parodies), such that the epistolary form maintained dominance well into the next century. Although this masquerade is conventional, so much so that we hardly notice, in a work that foregrounds the problems of imposture, deception, forgery, counterfeits, and false identities, it cannot be overlooked that *Ormond*, a fiction posing as a faithful biography, wears the disguise (not unlike Craig) of an apparently sincere, if ostentatious, show of artlessness.

Of course, like other imitative arts, the novelists' is a transparent deception, one readily even instantaneously seen through yet willingly entertained. With its epistolary structure and seduction plot, *Ormond* seems a comfortingly familiar imitation of the Richardson model. Readers of popular fiction then as now likely would not have looked twice at this imitation of an imitation of life. But S. C.'s strenuous insistence on the factuality of her narrative points to the fact that others were wary of fictions of all sorts.

Anyone familiar with novels from this decade will recognize the common apologia that these works are based on a true story and intended to inculcate the moral lessons derived from real life experience. The freedom from undue and morally-dubious embellishments is the theme of many prefaces and the direct claim of many titles, including William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy; or, The Triumph of Nature; Founded in Truth* (1789), Susannah Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (published in England as *Charlotte, a Tale of Truth* [1791]), and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton; A Novel; Founded on Fact* (1797). This phenomenon speaks to the ongoing discussion regarding the work of art's reflection of the real world and its influence upon it, which, in turn, is part of a broader set of issues that include the era's concern with the artful performance of social identity, its various responses to the artifice

of disguise and illusion, and its felt need to cultivate a sophisticated attitude toward imitation and imposture in art and life.

The problem of deception was "a cultural preoccupation" throughout the eighteenth century (Craske 146).[106] The intellectual investigations into this problem flowed through the Lockean psychology of the day in which all knowledge is derived from experience. If there is no innate knowledge, one's conceptions of reality and of moral value are determined by environmental stimuli. This reliance upon sense data, in turn, occasions the human susceptibility to being led astray by deceptive appearances. What then of the phenomenon of the imitative arts? Philosophers, art historian Matthew Craske observes, have long pondered "how a man of intellectual rigour whose mind was trained to search out fundamental principles should respond to arts which set out to deceive his senses" (145). But thinkers of this period took special interest in the basic deception of art, its presenting a version or copy of reality at some remove from the truth, and the strange allure it held in the minds of even quite rational observers.

In the social world of the era, this strange allure manifests in some circles as a play with ambiguity. In high-culture, as modeled by the French, there arose a mid-century vogue for social artifice and a polite sensibility marked by an enlightened and urbane attitude toward theatricality and masquerade. This is the era of outrageously cumbersome, uncomfortable, and expensive attire, made desirable in part for its ability to distinguish its wearer from his or her "perceived social inferiors" (147). This is the age, that is, of Madame Pompadour and her namesake towering wigs, and the age of the British Macaroni.

Others took a considerably more circumspect approach to the specious pleasures of dissimulation. Distrust of artifice, prosthetic fashion, florid rhetoric, and the increasing "fictitiousness of the world" emerged as a correlate to the rise of republicanism in the last quarter of the century (148). The Lockean view of the basic equality of all minds, the equal potential for developing rather than merely inheriting intellectual capacity and moral character, bolstered the emerging bourgeoisie's rejection of socio-political ranking. Such egalitarian or at least anti-aristocratic views carried to a reaction against the artificial markings of distinction and superiority, those put on airs, protocols, and fashions of the *theatre mundi*. Those who rejected the aristocratic pretense and the hazy morality of the masked revelers of high society favored the simple, the natural, and the sincere in language, in personal appearance, and in behavior.

Brown's title character Ormond, exemplifying this latter group, disdains and disregards the conventional façades of polite society with its perfunctory formalities, its "impertinent circuities and scruples" (153). "He treated with systematic negligence, the etiquette that regulates the intercourse of persons of a certain class," the narrator informs us (113). "He loved to mortify, by his negligence, the pride of his equals and superiors, but a lower class had nothing to fear from his insolence" (148). To Constantia, upon her first interview with him, he displays his principled authenticity and sincerity: "I have [. . .] overlooked ordinary forms; a negligence that has been systematic with me. [. . .] It is my way [. . .] to say what I think. I care little for consequences" (153, 149). In his unceremonious manners and unfiltered declarations, he proudly eschews false postures and feigned personae. And yet a socio-political principle may be only a secondary motivation for this stance. "His aversion to duplicity," we are told, "had flowed from

experience of its evils. He had frequently been made its victim; In consequence of this his temper had become suspicious, and he was apt to impute deceit on occasions when others, of no inconsiderable sagacity, were abundantly disposed to confidence" (115). Possessed of a cynical even paranoiac bent of mind and a probing eye, he takes pains to see through the polished surfaces, the frivolous pursuits, petty facetiousness, and foolish puffery of the so-called polite society.

However, sophisticated revelers as well as earnest republicans, all those who considered themselves enlightened, believed in the power of reason to discern reality, to discover the causes behind effects, the true situation behind deceptive appearances. "The very idea of intellectual 'enlightenment' was frequently associated with the exercise of 'penetrative' insight," Craske explains. "To be enlightened was to show a capacity to transcend the alluring deceit of surface appearances and to see through those seductive fictions which encouraged irrational fears and beliefs" (146). This enlightenment mode of reasoning confidently applied logic, disciplined and unbiased observation, as well as a certain sensibility, a sensibility universal yet susceptible of refinement, to penetrate the obscurities of the text of experience. Thinkers, like Francis Hutcheson and Lord Kames, acknowledged the benefits derived from that deception of the senses that was art and debated whether the charms it cast upon the perceiving subject were a harmless diversion or were justified by a high moral purpose. Kames, like Shaftesbury, believed sensations were accurate enough conveyors of external realities to form the basis for sure knowledge and for aesthetic and moral judgment. Our moral sense, according to this Scottish Common Sense view, sees virtue as moral beauty, as something pleasing to us when we see it, and vice as moral ugliness or deformity that evokes a painful emotion. Fiction and

drama, by virtue of their artificiality, can model good and evil in their most instructive forms.

Similarly, artists William Hogarth and Francisco Goya, exemplars of the civic humanist theory of illusion, as Craske explains, felt the deception that was imitative art should be used to reform the morals of society and to sharpen the "'percipience and intellectual agility of all people'" (151). Often exaggerating their depicted subjects for greater effect, these satirists aimed to pierce superficial appearances and expose the truth behind artifice. Goya, in particular, deplored masquerade. He regarded the indulgence in imposture and social performance merely an "opportunity to commit morally repugnant acts under the cover of anonymity" (155). For Goya, as for some others, the culture of deception found its emblem in the image of a bespectacled man diligently scrutinizing a woman whose appearance of respectability may be only an all-but-impenetrable disguise. In some works, however, it is the lady, now the emblem of menaced innocence, who is shamelessly ogled and pecked at by costumed men. Brown's Constantia, a young woman alone in the city, endures these cultural practices of visual penetration, coming under the intense gaze of a number of men, some looking with "inquisitive eye," some with the an artist's judgment, and others with a grossly acquisitive leer (51).[107] Employing his theatrical skills developed both in spite of and because of his aversion to deception, Ormond even transforms himself into a black chimney sweep and messenger so as to eye Constantia and her father where they live.

"This Mode of Multiplying Faces"

Although *Ormond* recreates scenes found in the satirists' images, Brown takes on this problem of deceptive appearance through not only subject matter alone but also

through the narrative form, a form that blurs the line between illusion and reality. And as such the better point of comparison may be the illusory productions of trompe l'oeil, paintings created to bemuse and confuse the senses, which as it happens were achieving a zenith in production and public interest during the period of Brown's novel writing. Perfecting a photorealistic image, the creator of the trompe l'oeil painting intends the content of the image to be perceived, at least for a moment, as actual, the thing itself and not a representation. The success of this optical illusion (the name is French for "fools the eye") rides on how well it imitates the depicted object's observable qualities, including its three-dimensionality, on some two-dimensional surface, often a wall or a framed sheet of canvas. The genre is centuries old and its function as a test of the artist's skill and as a pleasing deception for the observer is illustrated in the often retold story of the competition of Zeuxis and Parrhasius, Greek painters of the fifth century BC. After Zeuxis boasted that he had painted grapes so realistic that birds pecked at and attempted to eat them, fellow artist Parrhasius invited him to see his latest work, which was hanging behind a curtain. When Zeuxis reached out to draw aside the curtain, he found that it (the curtain) *was* the painting. I fooled animals, but you have bested me, Zeuxis conceded, for you have fooled a man, and an artist at that.

In her book-length examination of the political valences of illusionistic art in the early republic, Wendy Bellion argues that trompe l'oeil paintings produced by American artists in this era responded to and capitalized upon emergent ideas about perception, representation, and subjectivity. Some, she argues, operated as training exercises in discernment, as heuristic tools for sharpening the skills required for responsible republican citizenship. The idea was that careful scrutiny of the artful illusions in the

gallery, exhibition halls, and performance venues rewarded the perceptive observer with an understanding of the true state of affairs. This educative purpose she argues is the impetus behind the trompe l'oeil works of Philadelphia's Charles Wilson Peale and his sons, who maintained a museum adjacent to Independence Hall, seat of the federal government, and even held an exhibit in the building's second story during the controversial hearings on the Jay Treaty. At a time when both political parties were convinced of the other's perfidy, such exercising of the critical faculties, the artists hoped, better enabled the conscientious citizen, a jealous and perspicacious guardian of government probity, to see through politicians' representations and gain a knowledge of the true affairs of state.[108]

It would not be unreasonable to expect that Brown's narratives have a similar educative purpose. He was a part of the same culture, indeed the same city as Peale and his sons. And his works, and perhaps especially *Ormond*, partake of that general theme of the day's literary offerings: the operations of sincerity and duplicity, authenticity and artifice. Unlike the satirical works of the time, which ultimately function, even in their most outrageous expressions, as a didactic lesson, Brown's novel, in a manner broadly similar to the era's illusionistic paintings, works as a sort of exercise. The difficulty, however, lies in attending to the different operations and aims of these illusionistic exercises. Before examining just how *Ormond*, in fact, works against the epistemological assumptions and educative purpose behind trompe l'oeil art like Peale's, it may be helpful to consider the critical readings that explore the similarities.

Ormond was, of course, not posited as a genuine artefact in the way trompe l'oeil paintings are sometimes positioned in the viewing space so as to reinforce the illusion;

Brown's readers, who can readily see that his name appears on the title page as the author, do not encounter this work unaware of its status as a fiction.[109] And yet, as already suggested, there is another level of authenticity or integrity to be questioned. Like a trompe l'oeil painting, the narrator's account, upon consideration, reveals a tension between its surface representations and unseen realities. When eyed closely, S. C.'s avowedly faithful "history of Constantia Dudley" has no more credence than the "specious and complicated" history fabricated by Craig. In fact, in light of her reluctance to reveal "*all* the means by which [she] gained knowledge of [Ormond's] actions," her evident antipathy to his views and aims, and the several apparent absurdities of her story, S. C. may have less claim to credibility than the scrupulously agreeable and craftily confiding con artist (3). Some readings of the novel elaborate quite inventively upon this apparent hint.

One long-standing line of critical response applies a familiar form of causal explanation to the perceived formal fragmentariness and thematic incoherence as critics attempt to peer through the surface to a hidden depth or through the effect to its cause. Reading between the lines to deduce its partly obscured true story, or alternately to posit an explanation for the lack of a coherent plot or meaning, some readers intend to expose the author's intentional deceptions or his clumsy authorial machinations. Critics James Russo and Carl Nelson Jr., rather ingenious in their construction of alternate parallel narratives, explain, separately and to rather different ends, the contradictions, digressions, inconclusiveness, and other narrative abnormalities as intentional (if almost too clever) misdirection. Nelson, peering through the narrative inconsistencies, finds on the other side a biased and manipulative narrator increasingly shrill and irrational in the defense of

her conservative moral values. Taking a similar approach, James Russo looks behind the façade of a false, exculpatory narrative, to discern an elaborate, hidden history of Constantia's secret romantic involvement and criminal collusion with Craig. For both these critics, the themes of duplicity and masks, theatricality and identity performance, serve to clue the reader in to an intentionally ironic narrative form.[110] Some readings, however, focus not on demonstrating the duplicity of the teller or of the tale so much as on the unreliability of the author. Recognizing that it does not explain much to say, as commentators earlier in the last century had, that the peculiarities of Brown's novel are due to an eccentric mind, to carelessness, or to a rushed writing schedule, both Paul C. Rodgers and G. St. John Stott, in separate efforts, instead seek to ascribe some method to the madness, some rationale, if not a consistent controlling vision, behind the creative decisions. By way of a sort of reverse engineering of the text, they re-trace Brown's "improvisations" (Rodgers 1974) and "second thoughts" (Stott 1990) as he simply reacted without overarching design or plan to the exigencies of narrative construction. Each of these readings demonstrate impressive speculative ingenuity. And yet, such clever reconstructions call to mind the conspiracy theory mode of causal explanation so prevalent in Brown's era and, as I hope to show, so effectively challenged in *Ormond* and in other places in Brown's writings.

While some spy an intentional duality within the text, others a de facto duality between literary aims and real world limitations, still other readers discern a duality within the author himself. The opposing impulses of the novel, in the view of Paul Witherington, emerge from Brown's unseen but conjectured "personal conflict between aesthetic sensibility and moral sensibility."[111] Robert S. Levine argues that beneath the

overt expressions of skepticism regarding conspiracy theories by intellectuals like Brown lurks an anxiety stirred by the alarmist rhetoric of the day; and in the contradictory portrait of the radical Ormond, one can see that Brown's "hidden fear had been tapped" ("Villainy" 129). By examining the homo-social (if not homosexual) bond between Brown and Elihu Hubbard Smith, Caleb Crain uncovers a psychological dynamic that gives rise to Brown's taking first one socio-political position and then its opposite from one novel to another or even from one moment to another in the same work. With very little in the way of unambiguous extra-textual evidence to draw upon, however, arguments, like Witherington's, Levine's, and Crain's, arguments positing that the problematic text exposes the author's emotional or ideological confusion lay exposed to the charge of begging the question, i.e. the author's work reflects the inner conflicts we know he must have had to have produced such conflicted work.

Despite offering quite different interpretations, each of the above readings assumes that a baseline reality, an obscured but ultimately legible and reliable set of facts, can be glimpsed behind or through the misleading or obfuscating surface appearances. As such, they take the same approach to discernment and deception taken by the trompe l'oeil painters of the 1790s. They, in effect, affect to draw aside the curtain and expose a portrait of a jealous and sentimental Sophia; or of a lying, licentious Constantia; or perhaps of the frantic author himself scribbling away at his desk, struggling earnestly to achieve conventional aesthetic and moral aims or to reconcile his deep-seated ambivalence. And yet, as another line of criticism cogently argues, the search for a final explanation, a certain cause, or a true nature behind appearances in *Ormond* uncovers

only unwarrantable assumptions that collapse into irresolvable contradiction, incongruity, and inconclusiveness.

"The Vanity of Systems"

In the conventional view, in an age of disguise, nothing is what it seems, at first; however, there is, comfortingly, a reality somewhere underneath waiting to be revealed. Therefore, the way to true understanding, happiness, and morality is through the cultivation of a penetrative insight into the nature of things. In *Ormond*, however, characters (or the reader) often find that what lies beneath the deceptive appearance may be only another deceptive appearance. Spectacular examples of the failure of vision, both literal and figurative, suggest, not unreasonably, that perhaps still greater penetrative power is needed; and yet, as the competing epistemologies of the principle characters fail them, no definitive means of verification remains.

Several critical responses to the novel have recognized in it a concerted attack on the assumption of the stability of signs, the recoverability of origins, and the finality of conclusions. William Hedges, Cynthia S. Jordan, and John Cleman, each in turn, see in Brown's fiction a purposeful uncertainty, inconclusiveness, and resolute moral ambiguity. Norman S. Grabo sees patterns of uncanny coincidence serving an open-ended allegory. William Scheick, Michael Kreyling, and Steve Hamelman each find Brown's novels exhibiting what they argue can best be likened to a Derridean deconstruction of origins, language, and ultimate meaning. Disagreement persists, however, on the issue of what purpose may be served by Brown's skeptical analysis of ordering constructs.

Some, including Jordan, as well as Frank Shuffleton, Scott Ellis, and Thomas Koenig, argue that in refusing to reveal some unambiguous reality or ground of absolute truth, some stable and unified didactic lesson or meaning, Brown's novels prompt readers to engage in an active and open reading process, for doing so would promote, respectively, calm and prudent deliberation, a more supple and responsive justice system, greater sympathetic bonds, or more effective learning. This attention to the unreliability of ordering systems and to the need to continually check our perceptions against the unfolding of experience carries through the secondary literature up to the present moment. Much of the Brown criticism of the past twenty years or so, ranging widely through the intellectual context of the author's day, traces the novel's parsing of some seemingly irreducible, monolithic construct posited as an ordering system or principle, exposing its inherent internal conflicts, contradictory implications, ideological uses, and sometimes perverse outcomes or manifestations. Considered in the aggregate, these examinations of the novel's critical analyses of liberty (Cahill), republicanism (Drexler and White), the law (Shuffleton), the logic of the marketplace (Ellis), statism (von Morze), the reliance on rational autonomy underwriting Wollstonecraftian feminism (Layson), aesthetic education for virtuous citizenship (Morris), American identity (Bannet, Samuels), virtue (Christophersen), the private-public distinction (Chapman), and sympathy, including fraternal or sisterly models (Stern) and a lesbian model (Comment) all find Brown challenging totalizing systems, critiquing the use of these constructs as if they are fully adequate to human experience.[112]

There are many points of contact between my reading of *Ormond* and those put forth by these scholars, but there are a few important divergences as well. As the sheer

number of different critical foci might suggest, and several of the scholars acknowledge, Brown's compelling interest may lie not in any one of these ordering systems, per se. A more fundamental focus, I suggest, emerges in an essay published eight months after *Ormond*. In "Walstein's School of History, from the German of Krantz of Gotha," which conveys some of the central tenets of his literary theory, Brown contrasts the efficacy of "abstract systems and theoretical reasonings" with "eloquent narration," giving preference, not unsurprisingly, to the latter. He argues that

> Systems, by being imperfectly attended to, are liable to beget error and depravity. Truth flows from the union and relation of many parts. These parts, fallaciously connected and viewed separately, constitute error. Prejudice, stupidity, and indolence, will seldom afford us a candid audience, are prone to stop short in their researches, to remit, or transfer to other objects their attention, and hence to derive new motives to injustice, and new confirmations in folly from that which, if impartially and accurately examined, would convey nothing but benefit. [. . .]
>
> Mere reasoning is cold and unattractive. Injury rather than benefit proceeds from convictions that are transient and faint; their tendency is not to reform and enlighten, but merely to produce disquiet and remorse. They are not strong enough to resist temptation and to change the conduct, but merely to pester the offender with dissatisfaction and regret. (*Literary Essays* 35)

These comments underscore not the fallacy of any given system but the susceptibility of systems, even those expressly constructed to achieve general happiness and morality, to the weaknesses of human nature. Brown's concern in theory and practice is with this problematic interaction of abstractions with the embodied consciousness of human beings. In contrast to argument and precept, the detailing of action in an "eloquent narration," can "assail popular error and vice" through engaging the affections and winning over the reason by "incessant attacks," by investing the benefits of a system with a "seeming existence" and giving the evils which error generates a "sensible and present existence" (35).[113]

Though not impossible, this minimizing of error and vice, as incidents in *Ormond* repeatedly demonstrate, is easier said than done. The ideal of "impartially and accurately" examining any ordering system generally falls prey to the distorted vision of chronically self-interested humans who, particularly in this era, invest an inordinate faith in the "panoptic faculties of sight" (Bellion 7). Moreover, humans have a certain genius for constructing means of evading responsibility, particularly the responsibility for respectfully engaging alterity. And, perhaps especially in Brown's increasingly individualistic and commercialized society, this genius often operates in the form of self-delusive fantasies of benevolence and justification operating through what can be called the contractual model of social relations.

The contractual model of social relations provides cover for a multitude of sins. As aids in the determination of conduct, systems, pre-established conventions, and common expectations are useful, perhaps necessary for the relatively smooth operation of interpersonal relations on all scales. But if taken to be the sole (or overriding) and

absolute authority, they reduce alterity to fixed terms and function to limit each party's obligation to the other, even as one or another party may deem itself worthy of praise for a dutiful adherence to the contract. Fixing terms, contracts define the parties involved and the considerations owed by each, thereby disregarding, indeed actively discountenancing, any alteration over time or alterity beyond the fixed terms, unless they can be assimilated into a revised contract. When deferred to as a final truth, contracts (formal or informal, written, verbal, or unspoken) are instruments by which individuals absolve themselves of responsibility for regarding, respecting, and responding ethically to the uniqueness of a particular circumstance and the alterity of the other human being, that which exists or operates outside the logic of law, markets, language, and other ordering systems.

Ormond depicts this limiting of liability and absolving from obligations as more than self-protective non-involvement or neglect or even crass exploitation. Indeed, contracts of all sorts, through the vicissitudes of the plot, reveal themselves to be grounded on a sort of implied, provisionally deferred violence from which individuals are distanced, their direct and personal responsibility for the regarding of the other being replaced by the impersonal imperatives of an outside mechanism. And as I will discuss further on, the sub-textual violence of contractual relations rears its head in many of the novel's interpersonal engagements, whether a labor agreement, a business transaction, a marriage, or the social contract that binds a society.

This contractual model of human interaction relies for its appearance of consistency and impartiality on the sure knowledge and moral certainty established through the heuristics of vision, the same exercising and refining of penetrative insight

promoted in the arts, education, science and medicine, and the paranoiac political outlook of the age.[114] But, as with *Wieland*, the twists, turns, and breaks in Brown's sensationalistic plot serve to depict in dramatic hues the consequences of assuming the existence of an absolute, universal truth and one's capacity to access it. In the face of intellectual and moral challenges, characters struggle to maintain faith in their respective means of clarifying their moral vision, whether the transcendent power of the imagination and its works, the exercise of observation and reason, the refinement of sensibility, or the operation of a moral sense.

For the characters in Brown's previous novel *Wieland*, the production, contemplation, and collection of art serve as a means of refining and displaying their enlightened subjectivity; for the characters in *Ormond*, however, art takes on a more material and more dynamic role. In the busy milieu of Brown's second novel, art and the operations of imagination more broadly are more manifestly inextricable from material, embodied existence: from economics and marketplace logic, from issues of class identity and social status, and from interpersonal relations and considerations of sentimental value. From the opening paragraph, the characters are more actively involved in the world of art in a practical way; and art, in a practical way, actively shapes the world of the characters. In the various uses of and responses to art and aesthetic pleasure, *Ormond* registers both the negative and positive, destructive and constructive potentialities of art.

Stephen Dudley's youthful ambitions are built upon the belief that art is an escape from drudgery, the purgatory of deadened feelings, and the intellectual and moral torpor of the laboring class. Further, he evinces a quasi-aristocratic notion of the merit and privileges of enlightened intellect and refined sensibility. As the narrator reports, "His

habits had disqualified him for mechanical employments. He could not stoop to the imaginary indignity which attended them." In short, "The indulgence of his father had contributed to instill into him prejudices, in consequence of which a certain species of disgrace was annexed to every employment of which the only purpose was gain" (6-7). The death of the elder Dudley, however, forces the son to put his artist-intellectual skills into less ennobling but more remunerative use carrying on his father's apothecary business (mixing substances not for paints but for palliatives and purgatives).[115] He soon finds he cannot well-endure "the drudgery of a shop, where all the faculties were at a stand." It is a situation far from his liking, for it "not only precluded all those pursuits which exalt and harmonize the feelings but was detested by him as something humiliating and ignominious" (7). In his radically altered circumstance, he soon despairs of ever returning to his beloved art and attaining that transcendence. When Craig walks in off the street seeking a position, Dudley seizes the opportunity for the "immediate possession of ease," offering a job to this competent youth with the seemingly "modest and ingenuous aspect," "nothing but food, clothing, and lodging being stipulated as the reward of his services" (7, 8).

Dudley's aesthetic education, though it greatly expands his powers of observation and discernment, does not give him the clarity of vision to see through Craig's impostures. For critic Edward Cahill, Dudley's desire to pursue his art serves as a liability in a commercial society, one example of many from the novel that illustrate the dangers of imagination. It is possible, however, to see in this scenario an even more pernicious failure of vision and imagination. Michael J. Drexler and Ed White read Dudley's arrangement with the young Thomas Craig as an indulgence in the self-delusive

"fantasy" of republicanism, a proto-type of the American Dream, in which one transcends the need for further labor by convincing new comers to serve as labor machines devoid of or willing to defer their own desire for leisure and luxury. Combining these critical insights, one might argue that the aesthetic education Dudley received seems to provide the desired object of a delusive and self-serving fantasy and the imaginative capacity needed to indulge in it. But, of course, his own facility with the deception of the senses is matched and exceeded by that of his apprentice, the son of an illiterate washer woman. And unfortunately, "the arts of [this] subtle impostor" expose Dudley and his family to another, more systematized artifice, the law.

After losing everything, Dudley must again relinquish "those pursuits which exalt and harmonize the feelings" and put his pen to use as a scrivener in a law office. That is, he must become a copyist, a maker of mere imitations. Indeed, he makes imitations for a system (the legal system) that functions, the narrative will attest more than once, as a mere imitation, that is, an imitation of objective justice. In taking on this new position, "He was perpetually encumbered with the rubbish of the law, and waded with laborious steps through its endless tautologies, its impertinent circuities, its lying assertions, and hateful artifices" (20). Rather than an impartial mechanism upon which judgments of right and goodness can be securely built, the law often serves merely as a tool for justifying the pursuit of self-interest. Beyond the indignities and distaste he experiences in this line of work, Dudley's fall into the role of a scrivener is all the more ironic and humiliating in light of his recent personal experience. After Craig's embezzlement, including the full exploitation of the business's credit, "It was his [Dudley's] lot to fall into the grasp of men, who squared their actions by no other standard than law, and who

esteemed every claim to be just, that could plead that sanction" (17). In short, citing this self-enclosed abstraction with no absolute moral grounding, these men feel no compunction in stripping Dudley and his family of everything they own, including furniture and nearly all clothing. Indeed, by this standard "they deemed themselves entitled to his gratitude for leaving his person unmolested" (17). The critique of art (and artifice) extends here to a system of laws ("hateful artifices") that the disgruntled scrivener describes as "a tissue made up of the shreds and remnants of barbarous antiquity, polluted with the rust of ages, and patched by the stupidity of modern workmen, into new deformity" (20).

Thus, it is his misfortune to "fall a victim to the most atrocious arts" more than once (20). Indeed, Dudley, as a result of his still clinging to his vision of aesthetic pleasures, social distinction, and the gratifications of wealth in the midst of ruin, gives himself up to "a listless melancholy" (25). And despite his finely honed discernment, he is taken unawares, unable to see the "gradual and invisible" approaches of temptation as he degenerates into despair, drunkenness, and "low debauchery" (27). He brings upon himself the very ignominy and humiliation connected to mere sensual indulgence that he had so passionately disdained. Constantia's long suffering in "scenes of uproar and violence and foul disgrace that accompanied his paroxysms of drunkenness" ends only when her father is, in a sense, cured by blindness (27). The loss of sight, which "dissolved the spell, by which he was bound," symbolizes the breaking of the delusive "spell" of the heuristics of vision (27). His blindness, the result of his eyes being "invaded by a cataract," leads to a new clarity of understanding that "showed him, with a distinctness which made him shudder, the gulf to which he was hastening" (20, 28).

In his new state he falls into a new relation to art, as it becomes a means not of self-interested transcendence but of interpersonal connection. Dudley's lute, sold at auction but "gratuitously restored to him by the purchaser, on condition of his retaining it in his possession," resounds again during this period of impoverishment as it accompanies his daughter's voice, functioning not for the last time as a medium and symbol of communion (28). Edward Cahill and, more extensively, Scott Ellis examine the novel's display of morally legitimate uses of imagination and art. Both examine the manner in which tools or objects of artistic expression—the lute, a pair of miniature portraits, a song, as well as personal narratives—can function as media of exchange outside the dehumanizing logic of the market-place.[116]

Those exchanges that foster fellow-feeling are put to the test when the incursion of yellow fever works to expose the gross self-interest operating just below the surface of civil society. Whiston, a neighbor of the Dudleys, brazenly reneges on the social contract, abandoning his stricken sister. When the epidemic enters his house, he lights out of town, "allow[ing] his terrors to overpower what was due to his sister and to humanity" (48). Collapsed in a barn, infected and alone, he dies an agonizing and gruesome death, as do the farm family who out of fear of contagion refuse to approach him, deny him any aid, and even suffer him "to decay by piecemeal" (48). They subsequently fall prey to the "malignant vapours, which the corpse thus neglected, could not fail to produce" (49). One cannot escape the relation to others, this incident illustrates. The abandonment of obligations does not eliminate those obligations. Ormond will later observe that we cannot avoid being in a contractual relation of sorts, a connection of almost mechanical necessity: "Man could not be otherwise than a cause of

perpetual operation and efficacy. He was part of a machine, and as such had not power to withhold his agency. Contiguousness to other parts, that is, to other men, was all that was necessary to render him a powerful concurrent" (112). Further, Ormond holds that we cannot avoid producing evil when we act (or fail to act) in a corrupt society. The novel, however, offers an alternative view. In Constantia, we see one who chooses to take full, unqualified responsibility for the other, taking it upon herself, for example, to serve as nurse to Whiston's fatally ill sister Mary.

But others maintain their contractual duty so as to secure what they want. M'Crea, the nephew of the deceased landlord Mathews, in the midst of the epidemic comes to demand the rent. "He was not unconscious of the inhumanity and sordidness of this proceeding," the narrator explains, "and therefore, endeavoured to disguise it by the usual pretences" (50). Pleading his own obligations to support his widowed aunt, he finds the contractual relation a useful mask for greed. But the contract also sanctions a resort to force. Later, when incensed by the counterfeit bank note Constantia unwittingly passed along to him (another of Craig's deceptions), M'Crea demands from the impoverished and disabled Dudley all to which he is legally entitled upon threat of eviction and a certain wintery death.

To appease the importunate landlord, Constantia must sacrifice the miniature portrait of her beloved childhood friend as collateral. To M'Crea the trinket is an object having only a certain monetary value; to Constantia "It seemed as if she could have endured the loss of eyes with less reluctance than the loss of this inestimable relique" (75). The critic Ellis notes the allusion to Dudley's recent blindness here, but this and other remarks also register a critique of the reduction of everything to what can be seen,

that is, categorized, quantified, and, often, commodified. When Dudley's lute must be sold to secure fuel against the cold, his words suggest the instrument's function as an alternative to the acquisitiveness of his days of sightedness: "It was, in some degree, a substitute for the eyes which I have lost, but now let it go, and perform for me perhaps the dearest of its services" (76). Much later, we learn that the unscrupulous M'Crea sold the miniature for the worth of its gold. The goldsmith who bought it, in turn, sees its market value as an object of beauty. And finally the con artist Martynne prizes it for its use value as a prop in his illicit schemes. What once served to enhance human connections are seen only as means toward mere monetary gain or social advantage.

As Scott Ellis argues, this marketplace rationality that commodifies everything extends to personal relations in the novel, with the portrayal of the reduction of women to property.[117] The street ruffians who argue over who will be the first to sexually assault Constantia exemplify this in its crudest form. One "seemed to think his property invaded," the other seemed "disposed to assert his claim by force" (80). The critique of contractual relations extends, naturally, to the marriage contract, as well, particularly when marriage is seen as an extension of business, as it is by Balfour, the man who rescues Constantia from the thugs. The precociously self-possessed Constantia had earlier deliberated upon the institution of marriage, "a contract to endure for life," but Balfour's attentions occasion Constantia's ruminations on a woman's subjectivity consequent to marriage: "So far from possessing property, she herself would become the property of another" (21, 84). This Scottish adventurer, characterized by his "strict adherence to the maxims of trade," his being "governed by the principles of mercantile integrity in all his dealings" seems the bloodless embodiment of the logic of the

marketplace, particularly in his peculiar interest in her management of household economy rather than her moral or aesthetic virtues. Although a "stranger to violent emotions of any kind," he nevertheless allows the maxims and principles to work violence in his interest (81). When Constantia turns down the incredulous Balfour's proposal, his sister, described as something like his double, exacts revenge on her. The hidden threat of violence is actually born out in the punishment meted out to Constantia in the form of gossip and a concerted effort of the sister's circle of female friends to shut her out of her occupation as a seamstress. With her only means of procuring gainful employment cut off, she, her dependent father, and their former servant girl Lucy again face death by starvation.

Ormond abhors marriage as a "contract" "iniquitous and absurd" (127). But he negotiates in bad faith the terms of his alternate, unconventional arrangement with Hellen, a young woman who "scarcely comprehends the principle that governs the world, and in consequence of which, nothing can be gained but by giving something in exchange for it" (141). He thinks of women's intellectual capacities and sensibilities as inherently inferior to men and sees a wife as a mere superintendent of a household. As such, "He wanted instruments and not partakers of his authority. One whose mind was equal and not superior to the cogent apprehension and punctual performance of his will. One whose character was squared, with mathematical exactness to his situation" (128). Hellen, formed and educated to be an object charming to the senses, seems to him debarred by her sex from the heights of eloquence and wisdom. Once installed into a Philadelphia mansion as his mistress, Hellen isolates herself from the judging eyes of the

world, finding friendship only in Constantia, who becomes her confidante and her advocate against the intractable Ormond.

Cleaving to his idealized rationality, he is unable to understand let alone appreciate the aspects of Hellen's mind and character that are not easily quantified in calculations of worth and instrumentality. Her skill as an actor, he admits, is formidable: "When his pupil personated the victims of anger and grief, and poured forth the fiery indignation of Calista, or the maternal despair of Constance, or the self-contentions of Ipsipile, he could not deny the homage which her talents might claim" (130). Ironically and sadly, Ormond seems unable or unwilling to recognize the source of her perfect impersonations—her own intense experience of these feelings in the face of Ormond's shallow affection for her. In music, too, "Hellen had long relinquished the drudgery of imitation," though again it is her pent-up passions that power precisely those performances Ormond finds so pleasing. Her ignorance of science, history, and philosophy is the result of a conventionally gendered education. "Women are generally limited to what is sensual and ornamental," the narrator had earlier explained. "Music and painting, and the Italian and French languages, are bounds which they seldom pass" (33). But this limitation cannot hide her capacity for sophisticated thinking. Her ability to be "sedate, considerate, extensive in foresight, and fertile in expedients" shines forth in her skill at the "*science*" of chess, which Ormond held as "a sort of criterion of human capacity" (131, italics in the original). Ormond admits to being confused by her "contradiction," a measure of the role the females characters tend to play in this narrative, that of the grotesque.[118]

The appearance of contradiction and the wonder, surprise, or disgust evoked by female characters' violation of the conventions of gendered education and virtue speak to Brown's recurring theme: Conceptions of truth and value and the everyday experience of the world are processed through a perceptual mechanism that is never free from distorting influence, making impossible the task of distinguishing between objective truth and subjective experience. As such what passes as our sure knowledge of things, persons, and meanings that seem self-evident and firmly rooted in the logical, natural, and unquestionably real is deeply unstable and contestable.

Although it is Constantia's physical and moral integrity that serves as the guiding interest of the narrator and her addressee, a concern with purity and corruption pervades the entire narrative. Throughout, the language suppurates with the imagery of contamination and contagion. Brown, of course, is not concerned merely with the Richardsonian theme of the seduction of a pure young lady, but with the complicated tangle of problems plaguing the nation and the world at that moment.

Paradoxically, with the ever greater interconnectedness and interdependencies came ever more rigid divisions and divisiveness, ever more fear of corruption. Perhaps this is best exemplified in one of the era's lasting legacies: the establishment of the first American political party system, in which conflicting views of political reality in the early republic become increasingly institutionalized. The informal, narrowly-focused, short-term skirmishes of factional politics that marked the revolutionary and pre-ratification years gave way in the 1790s to the formation of a system of structured political parties each aligned with different regions, occupations, monetary policies, views on slavery, and favored foreign allies and each claiming to represent the truest,

most pure vision of American republican values. Political parties arose even in the face of the still reigning ideals that decried political parties as gross violations of republican principles. Both sides argued that it organized only as a defensive measure in response to the other party organizing first. Self-defense becomes the specious rationalization for logically inconsistent and morally dubious offensive measures, as seen in the origins of Ormond's deployment of theatrical skill, impersonation and costume in his attempt to head-off the fraudulent efforts of others: "The treachery of mankind compelled him to resort to it. If they should deal in a manner as upright and explicit as himself, it would be superfluous. But since they were in the perpetual use of stratagems and artifices, it was allowable, he thought, to wield the same arms" (115-6). In the contest to define the new nation, the stakes were high and the rhetoric was often caustic, hyperbolic, libelous, and even paranoiac.

Written in the aftermath of the Alien and Sedition Acts and the yellow fever epidemic that overtook and fused with anxieties about external and internal threats to political integrity and survival, *Ormond* plays upon on the paradox of a society based on the ideal of openness, benevolence, and mutual trust (in social, political, and economic exchanges) giving rise to a culture of paranoia, conspiracy, and secrecy. The year 1798 saw the paroxysm of paranoia—oriented inwardly as rabid partisanship and outwardly as reactionary and bellicose xenophobia—that jeopardized the republic's continued existence as a unified and a sovereign nation. As historian Gordon Wood explains, the same rationality that undergirds the movement toward democracy also functions to limit available conceptions of the causes of social processes and political events, making conspiracy theory both reasonable and necessary. But in the last years of the century, the

enormity of events, particularly the vicissitudes of the French Revolution, strained this mode of causal explanation, producing conspiratorial explanations exquisitely twisted, absurd, and grotesque.

Looking into some of his essayistic writings, one can see that for Brown, while there may be no infallible formula for discerning cause, there is a wrong way to ascribe causes to effects. That way involves disregarding or forgetting the circumstances surrounding the effects, seeking causes in too narrow a fashion. In comments regarding the ancient epics of Homer and Virgil, Brown refers to barbarous times when "truth was deformed by tradition and credulity [. . .] effects were disjointed from their causes, and unattended with their circumstances [and in poetry] invention supplied the defects of memory, and embellished events with causes and circumstances, grotesque, miraculous, and incredible."[119] There is no going back to a pre-Enlightenment mentality regarding causality, but Brown also suggests that the moderns are still susceptible to simplistic explanations for complex phenomena. In a review published six months after *Ormond*, Brown rebuts the paranoiac picture put forth in a Fourth of July address that takes up Abbé Barruel's account of the Illuminati's role in instigating and controlling the revolution in France and its designs for spreading its corrosive doctrines to America and beyond.

> Some would reason thus: Men are liable to error, and though they may intend good, may commit enormous mistakes in the choice of means. While they imagine themselves labouring for the happiness of mankind, loosening the bonds of superstition, breaking the fetters of commerce, out-rooting the prejudice of birth, by which father transmits to son absolute

> power over the property, liberty, and lives of millions, they may, in reality, be merely pulling down the props which uphold human society, and annihilate not merely the chains of false religion, but the foundations of morality—not merely the fetters of commerce, and feudal usurpations upon property, but commerce and property themselves. The apology which may be made for such is, that though their activity be pernicious, their purposes are pure.[120]

Described by S. C. as "a contradictory and unintelligible" being, Ormond embodies that paradigm-disrupting otherness of the radical revolutionaries and of the yellow fever itself (3). In Constantia's interactions with him, fixed understanding and certainty fade into perplexity, self-evident facts into the mere appearance of conclusiveness. Ormond, mixing sincerity with obfuscation, is both answering and not answering Constantia's queries:

> His disclosures [. . .] were imperfect. What knowledge was imparted, instead of appeasing, only tended to inflame her curiosity. His answers to her enquires were prompt, and at first sight, sufficiently explicit, but upon reconsideration, an obscurity seemed to gather round them, to be dispelled by new interrogatories. These, in like manner, effected a momentary purpose, but were sure speedily to lead into new conjectures, and re-immerse her in doubts. The task was always new, was always on the point of being finished, and always to be re-commenced. (177)

At times the very form of the narrative refutes the assumption of a stable plane between representation and reality, between objective reporting and subjective

experience, between one individual identity and another. In the account given of the fateful encounter of Baxter, the husband of Constantia's friend Sarah, the narrating voice slips into free indirect discourse in recounting the doomed man's thoughts regarding whether he should investigate the disquieting disappearance of his neighbor: "As to entering the house and offering his aid, if aid were needed, he had too much regard for his own safety, and too little for that of a frog-eating Frenchman, to think seriously of that expedient" (64). In this slippage from diegesis (narrating, telling) to mimesis (imitation, showing, direct representation), S. C., the speaking voice of the narrative, fades from clear view as a character's words or thoughts ("frog-eating Frenchman") flow into and merge with her words and her identity flows into and merges with his.[121] Actually, the events pass through multiple story-tellers, from Baxter to his wife, from her to Constantia, from Constantia to S. C. This subtly disorienting phase transition between nominally separate persons or identities occurs again, in much stronger form, in the scene with the surly Indian Queen Tavern man, whom Constantia questions regarding the whereabouts of the man she has just followed there, Thomas Craig:

> A waiter informed her that Craig had lately been in, and was now gone out to spend the evening. Whither had he gone? she asked.
>
> How was he to know where gentlemen eat their suppers? Did she take him for a witch? What, in God's name, did she want with him at that hour? Could she not wait, at least, till he had done his supper? He warranted her pretty face would bring him home time enough. (93-4)

In breaking the plane between narrator and narration, S. C. mimics the movement of Ormond, who takes his dramaturgical skills out into the real world, onto the world stage,

"blend[ing] in his own person the functions of the poet and the actor" (116). His dramas "were not fictitious but real" (116). The form of the narrative reiterates the oft-repeated trope of characters as actors and authors and audience, as those who either appear on the stage and play a role or who witness events unfold in a "theater."

Other incidents enact a more forceful breaking of boundaries, not between the narrator and a character within her tale but between inside the narrative and outside, between the teller and the reader of the tale. After Constantia finally learns that Craig can be found at the house of a Mr. Ormond (the first mention of the name in the narrative), we hear Craig's inner monologue regarding the letter she has sent up to him calling upon his sense of justice and compassion in relieving her father's distress. Indeed, the form these thoughts take in the telling present yet another and more forceful breaking of boundaries; starting from the point of view of an observer, the perspective shifts abruptly into the form of free indirect discourse then to free direct discourse:

> The letter was received, and perused. His conscience was touched, but compunction was a guest, whose importunities he had acquired a peculiar facility of eluding. Here was a liberal offer. A price was set upon his impunity. A small sum, perhaps, would secure him from all future molestation. –She spoke, to be sure, in a damned high tone. [. . .] How the little witch talks! Just the dreamer she ever was! Justice! Compassion! Stupid fool! One would think she'd learned something of the world by this time. (96-7)

Actually, the presentation is something even more direct than free direct discourse, in that the term *discourse* presupposes an interlocutor, and here we have only words unmediated

by a discursive persona. These are the free flowing thoughts of another person's mind as we could only experience them if we were eavesdropping on a private soliloquy. From the start, where the prefatory note addresses someone other than ourselves, we have been secret witnesses to the affairs of Constantia, trespassers into her private world. And in select places in the narrative, we even follow S. C. into the supposedly hidden and discreet realm of private thoughts.

But this is a lie; although human events and personal identities are inextricability linked, they cannot blur into a totality. Like Ormond, whose secret witnessing through disguise and impersonation "enabled him to gain access, as if by supernatural means, to the privacy of others, and baffle their profoundest contrivances to hide themselves from his view," S. C. maintains some undisclosed means of obtaining knowledge that, we may believe, "flattered [her] with the possession of something like Omniscience" (116). As we see in Ormond's startling transformation into a black chimney sweep in order to spy on the intriguing Constantia, skills and intellect afford him no discernible connection to this racial and socio-economic other. Indeed, his blackface escapade functions in the service of an invasion of privacy, not the cultivation of fellow-feeling.

Much later, S. C. perpetrates a still more forceful transgression. "I must be forgiven if I now introduce myself on the stage," she announces (224). And after relating twenty-two chapters from outside the story, the narrator suddenly steps into her book.[122] S. C., we finally learn, is Sophia Courtland (née Westwyn), the childhood friend long missed by Constantia.

"The Folly of Prediction"

The deceptions of the senses in *Ormond* extend beyond false appearances and unstable identities to misleading modes of causal explanation. Brown's inventiveness tests the boundaries of probability and possibility as the plot unfolds in a series of striking coincidences. The woman Constantia meets in the music store and to whom she sells the lute is the same woman Sarah Baxter described as the unfortunate Ursula Monrose in her story of her husband's death. After M'Crea presses charges against Dudley for passing a counterfeit bank note, the magistrate Constantia must see is Melbourne, the very acquaintance of her father that she had just been seeking to ask for help (105). Ursula / Martinette's new residence is next door to the Melbourne's, where Constantia, while visiting, hears the distinctive sound of the lute she had sold, leading to their second meeting. Rather improbably, the house in Perth Amboy that had been auctioned with Dudley's other property happened have been bought by Ormond, who then gifted it to Hellen, who then bequeathed it to Constantia; and thus "by a singular contexture of events, it had reverted to those hands, in which the death of the original proprietor, if no other change had been made in his condition, would have left it" (266). Also improbably, the miniature given to M'Crea for collateral and sold by him to a goldsmith is bought by Martynne, a man Sophia meets in Baltimore through Constantia's cousin Mary Ridgeley to whom Martynne had conspicuously displayed the portrait she immediately recognized as Sophia's. After changing her plans to leave for New York so as to follow the exchange history of this trinket back to Constantia and her possibly still-extant "memorials" or diary entries, she happens to stay at the boarding house Constantia visits in her search for the miniature portrait's buyer. She then also happens to play the tune

she composed with Constantia at the very moment her long-lost friend is downstairs inquiring about Martynne.

The sheer unexpectedness of coincidence and marvelous events, their apparent violation of probability, serves to demonstrate the limitations of characters' modes of causal explanation, of their understanding of how the world works.[123] When Constantia, awed by Martinette's personal history, admits astonishment—"I am apt to think that your life is a tissue of surprising events, [. . .] events more wonderful than any which I have known" (192)—, Martinette replies that such a response is the result not of her story being objectively wondrous, but of Constantia's limited idea of probabilities, making explicit Brown's challenge to the era's narrow, reductive explanatory schemes. Her words may even serve as a retort to incredulous critics of Brown's contrived coincidences: "Wonderful! Pish! Thy ignorance, they miscalculation of probabilities is far more so. [. . .] To such as you, my tale might abound with novelty, while to others more acquainted with vicissitudes, it would be tedious and flat" (193).

Moreover, these features of the plot reiterate the theme of "the inextricability of human events," the connectedness of lives and the ripple effect of individual's actions in a community of mankind, which has important implications for moral judgment and action (264). In a world of increasing complexity, even to the point of chaos, how does one understand events and judge appearances? How can one increase one's capacity for accurate prediction and discernment? And, finally, where in the chain of causality does one locate where moral accountability lies?

From the mechanical model of nature, which posits the necessary connection between causes and effects, comes the characteristic mode of eighteenth-century thinking

about what is behind developments in human affairs. What has come to be called the paranoid style of the era's rhetoric ultimately consists, again as Gordon Wood argues, not in some form of mass hysteria, but in the rational yet overly simplistic attribution of effects in the political realm to causes arising from human agency, and, moreover, directly from human intentions. "Moral deeds implied moral doers," Wood writes, "when things happen in society, individuals with particular intentions, often called 'designs,' must be at the bottom of them. All social processes could be reduced to specific individual passions and interests" (98). A mechanistic and personalistic view of causality in the human sphere represents an intellectual step forward from explanations that fall back on the workings of chance or providence. For many enlightened thinkers, however, the cogency of the mechanistic model of the physical universe does not override the deep concern for morality, the idea that individuals are morally accountable for their actions. Even Newton, stepping back from the implications of his own work, posited various divine actuators in matter and physical forces, Wood notes. Effect follows from some human action (the cause), it was reasoned, and it logically partakes of the moral quality of the originating motivation; that is, bad intentions produce bad effects. Colonial Americans used this language of conspiracy and evil, hidden machinations to explain the adverse policies of the English government toward them. Similarly, political commentators in England spied the tell-tale signs of secret domestic cabals operating the levers of power. And later, in revolutionary France, the failure of military campaigns brought heavy consequences upon the French generals whose incompetence or even secret treasonous schemes seemed the only plausible causal explanations for the defeat of such a righteous endeavor. Through the last quarter of the

century, many interpreters of contemporary history assumed that human will must be behind any and all visible effects in human affairs.

This humanistic mode of causal explanation was not the only one around, of course. In attempts to reconcile the new mechanical conception of the physical world with the claims of religion, some adopted a providential naturalism, the view that the universe is divinely ordered in such a way that good naturally produces good, and evil, evil. In this view, as expounded by the likes of Francis Hutcheson and Lord Kames, the material body is endowed with natural faculties capable of discerning, through the laws of nature, the laws of God. Moral action thus consists in discerning these laws through a moral-aesthetic sense. This seems to be Sophia's outlook generally. Her defense of her passionate attachment for her friend draws upon a theistic worldview:

> I am not unaware of the divine superintendence, of the claims upon my gratitude and service, which pertain to my God. I know that all physical and moral agents, are merely instrumental to the purpose that he wills, but though the great author of being and felicity must not be forgotten, it is neither possible nor just to overlook the claims upon our love, with which our fellow-beings are invested. The supreme love does not absorb, but chasten and enforce all subordinate affections. In proportion to the rectitude of my perceptions and the ardour of my piety, must I clearly discern and fervently love, the excellence discovered in my fellow-beings, and industriously promote their improvement and felicity. (224)

Here is a philosophy positing the existence of an absolute truth or reality; it is based in God, he who "superintends" the world. The divine author is the ultimate cause of all

physical and moral effects. He is "the great author of being and felicity" who imposes distinctions of "excellence" and "chasten[s] and enforce[s]" our love of "our fellow-beings" (224). And our duty is to rectify our perceptions so as to "clearly discern" these absolute and truly extant distinctions.

Some, however, took the mechanistic view to the logical extreme, concluding that determinate beings are not wholly accountable for their actions. What little free will one has consists in whether one acts in accordance with what is necessary, which can be discerned through the enlightened exercise of reason. This is the Necessitarian model of morality, a version of which Ormond claims to hold. "I cannot help it; I make not myself; I am moulded by circumstances: Whether I shall love thee or not, is no longer in my own choice," he tells Hellen, explaining he loves and intends to marry Constantia and is therefore leaving her. Such declarations follow from Ormond's materialist picture of reality. Ormond is an atomist, in the vein of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius: "The universe was to him, a series of events, connected by an undesigning and inscrutable necessity, and an assemblage of forms, to which no beginning or end can be conceived" (180). Conceiving of the cosmos as the mechanical integration and disintegration of forms, Ormond, like William Godwin, sees a mere mechanical necessity governing all physical and moral chains of causality.

In this view, the operations of the individual mind and of human societies are similarly mechanical. In *Wieland,* characters contemplate the possible breakdown in the physiological system that links the senses to the understanding and the will: "The will is the tool of the understanding which must fashion its conclusions on the notices of sense. If the senses be depraved, it is impossible to calculate the evils that may flow the

consequent deductions of the understanding" (35). Ormond, likewise, takes a materialist view when he holds that a corrupt social system will produce only corrupt effects no matter the actions taken or the intents behind them: "A mortal poison pervaded the whole system by means of which every thing received was converted into bane and purulence. Efforts designed to ameliorate the condition of an individual, were sure of answering a contrary purpose. The principles of the social machine must be rectified, before men can be beneficially active. Our motives may be neutral or beneficent, but our actions tend merely to the production of evil" (112-13).

His philosophy, not unlike Sophia's, assumes the existence of an absolute truth, albeit one in opposition to the views of religionists. "His meditations on religious points," we are told, "had been intense. Enthusiasm was added to disbelief, and he not only dissented but abhorred" (180). It is based on a mechanical universe (not God), where physical laws are the ultimate cause of events and appearances ("forms"). There is no meaning or motivation being expressed in these events and appearances, and the only duty or imperative is to seek one's own happiness. The exercise of reason (not gifted by or connected to God) is the means of discerning one's true happiness and the means toward achieving it. But we must consider Ormond's philosophy in light of Hellen's suicide: For all his confidence in his organs of sight and his penetrative intellect, he did not see that coming.

Taught by her father, who believed religious inquiry was too important for "infantile and premature instruction," Constantia is neither an advocate nor a critic, but merely indifferent to religion (179-80). By conducting her education through Tacitus and Milton, her father sought to foster in her eloquence and wisdom. Through Newton and

Hartley, he "unveiled to her the mathematical properties of light and sound, taught her as a metaphysician and anatomist, the structure and power of the senses, and discussed with her the principles and the progress of human society" (33).[124] Sophia laments this lack of religious grounding. However, she takes pains to say that Constantia's "habits rather than her opinions, were undevout," suggesting that her friend's mind is not closed on the subject. Regarding Constantia's worldview, we learn, "She was unacquainted with religion. She was unhabituated to conform herself to any standard, but that connected with the present life. Matrimonial, as well as every other human duty, was disconnected in her mind, with any awful or divine sanction. She formed her estimate of good and evil, on nothing but terrestrial and visible consequences" (179). In contrast to Sophia and Ormond, in the matter of religion, she encountered nothing that "suggest[ed] to her the importance of investigation and certainty. [. . .] In her struggles with misfortune, she was supported and cheered by the sense of no approbation, but her own. [. . .] All opinions in her mind were mutable, inasmuch as the progress of her understanding was incessant" (179-80). Thus, she holds no a priori beliefs, either religious or Necessitarian, no deference to an outside authority regarding right and wrong. But also she is guided by no precepts or rules that might counterbalance the weight of experience, the heuristics of her own vision. Visible consequences, as the narrator observes and events repeatedly demonstrate, are subject to fraud and misinterpretation and to the distortion of passions and interests. Even Constantia suffers from unconscious biases: "In no case, perhaps, is the decision of an human being impartial, or totally uninfluenced by sinister and selfish motives. If Constantia surpassed others, it was not, because, her motives were pure, but, because, they possessed more of purity than those of others. Sinister considerations flow

in upon us through imperceptible channels, and modify our thoughts in numberless ways, without our being truly conscious of their presence" (157).

"So Painful a State"

Although many have zeroed in on Brown's relentless skepticism toward all ordering schemes, there is little agreement as to the novel's purpose or governing outlook. Some see nihilism, others indecision. Hamelman sees an exhibition of the instability of language, something like that of modern deconstructionist theory, but one only accidentally achieved in the work of a conflicted author who has lost control of his material. One might look at Brown's treatment of reigning epistemologies as the promotion a kind of intellectual humility; and as such, his approach may be mistaken for that of the earlier views of causality and morality, either fatalistic or pious, which recognized an inherent limit to the power of human comprehension. Layson is among those who view Brown's critique of reason in terms of a reactionary conservative recoil from the excesses of radical rationality.

But Brown's recognition of limitations, I argue, is perhaps better understood as the consequence of a relentless intellectual rigor. In a brief article entitled "Yellow Fever," Brown uses the division of opinion among physicians on the topic of the origin and treatments of this disease to illustrate the difficulty of keeping open-minded:

> Doubt is so painful a state, and a man's pride and prejudice are so unavoidably engaged, on one side or the other, as he advances in his inquiry, and we so easily and suddenly pass from a state of neutrality, in which we only inquire after truth, into a state of conviction, when we merely search for arguments and facts in favour of one side; that nothing is

> rarer than a physician who hesitates on this subject. Some men may vary from year to year, and change sides as often as the fever visits us, but they are ardent and dogmatic in maintaining what happens to be their present opinion, and stigmatize all their opponents as fools and villains.[125]

Just such an operation of mind is evinced in Martinette's benefactress Lady D'Arcy, who switches back and forth in both religious convictions and romantic devotions but remains ardently committed to her current views and passionately discriminatory against others. She even goes so far as to forbid the burgeoning romantic connection between her adored adopted daughter and her nephew, the irreligious Wentworth, threatening him with disinheritance if the relationship continues. When Lady D'Arcy herself falls in love with the Spaniard Antonio de Leyva, breaking her commitment of eternal dedication to her dead husband, Martinette is free to marry her zealously idealistic Wentworth and follow him into combat. After succumbing to the arts of a seducer who kills the jealous Leyva in a duel, Lady D'Arcy reverses course again, abjuring the Catholic religion and returning to England and her former faith. She exemplifies the extreme of a common human quest for and delusive maintenance of certainty that produces grotesque effects.

For a skeptic and freethinker in the Enlightenment, the explanatory conceptions and moral prescriptions of religionists seem unsatisfactory. But the rationalism behind scientific advances in understanding the physical world, when transposed to the social world, could and often did lead to either simplistic, reductive notions of moral responsibility (conspiracy theory for example) or toward a nihilistic Necessitarianism in which the question of morality seemed a quaintly naive concern.

Is Constantia Dudley Brown's "model of right conduct"? A few critics, including Drexler and White and Bill Christophersen, see in the text a critique of her republican virtue, of her fantasy or delusion of selflessness, which is belied by the benefits she accrues over the course of the novel. A number of others, however, consider Constantia the heroine of the piece. English writer Thomas Love Peacock, for example, reports that she "held one of the highest places, if not the highest, in [Percy] Shelley's ideality of female character" (qtd. in Clark 173). But if we *are* to consider her an ideal, how are we to think of emulating this model? Following the work of Thomas Koenig on Brown's "instructional fictionality," we might suggest that her utility as a moral model lies not in any precepts she may voice, not in the emulation of her actions, but in her "mode of reasoning and acting." Constantia's most conspicuous displays of moral virtue include her care for the friendless Hellen, her brave and compassionate attentions to the infected Mary Whiston, and her refusing to prosecute Craig or entertain thoughts of vengeance toward the unknown murderer of her father. "She recoiled with loathing," we are told, "from considerations of abstract justice, or political utility, when they prompted to the prosecution of the murderer" (217). All of these actions arise not from slavish adherence to precepts, not from mere mindless sentimentality, and certainly not from simple emulation of those around her. Her value as a moral model is not in her actions themselves, not in her particular responses per se, but in her taking on the responsibility of regarding the other in all his or her alterity, in her not hiding behind a priori social or legal judgments or socially-acceptable self-interest, behind "abstract justice, or political utility" (217). The merit is not in knowing one's duty but in the struggle to know, the reaching out to the outside, to the other, taking responsibility for responding to the other

in his or her true otherness (both in the call to care even in the midst of contagion, stench and filth, and in the midst of violent passion, offering soothing counsel or even violent resistance). Such a struggle to know requires a relentlessness, a care to not "stop short in [one's] researches" ("Walstein's" *Literary Essays* 35). Contra Ormond's Godwinian precepts, Brown posits a kind of freedom from not only church and state authority but also the authority of the self and its claims to unmediated truth and moral insight and discernment of distinct borders and stable identities**.**

In the closing chapters, Ormond's overtures and intrigues fail to secure Constantia's intellectual and romantic acquiescence, leading to a final, fatal confrontation. Constantia, who remains emotionally conflicted and almost willfully obtuse, seems unable to see the danger Ormond represents. (At one point, after putting his hand to his forehead, he exclaims, "Catch you not a view of the monsters starting into birth *here*?" [254].) When, however, at the story's climax Constantia fends off the rapacious Ormond, killing him with a pen knife, the pleasure the reader might take in the depiction of virtue and reason conquering vice and error is counteracted by the reaction of the heroine herself.

While Sophia makes preparations in New York for the voyage that will take the two of them to England and away from their homeland for good, Constantia chooses to spend the interim at the Perth Amboy country house. The description of this edifice rather emphatically underscores its status as a metonym for Dudley's aesthetic education and Constantia's republican virtue, that which has been savaged by the likes of Craig and Ormond. At dusk Ormond arrives on horseback at the isolated house, bringing with him the dead body of Thomas Craig, the con man who had swindled and, according to him,

murdered her father at his (Ormond's) command. He reveals to Constantia that his seemingly supernatural knowledge of her plans to leave with Sophia was not supernatural at all but came through the expedient of his eavesdropping on their conversations from an adjacent house, untenanted but owned by him and connected to Constantia's apartment by a doorway. Although it has received little or no critical attention, it is significant that this hidden portal, as he reveals, lies hidden behind a "sheet of canvass" (279). In slipping through the canvas into Dudley's chamber to see that Craig murders the old man, it is as if he is stepping right out of a painting. Just as *Wieland*'s Carwin had made literal the fantasy notion of a disembodied intelligence, Ormond has made literal the fantasy notion that the real thing that lies behind the surface appearance will out. He is not only the preeminent possessor of the era's idealized penetrative insight, his stratagems giving him "something like Omniscience"; he becomes the embodiment of that ideal as well. His crimes thus symbolize the dangers of the heuristic of vision and the contractual model of relation that it sanctions.

"Inured to the Shedding of Blood?"

Is Constantia's killing of Ormond in this final meeting an act of righteous violence, of absolute, necessary, or divine justice merely working through her? This is the real question behind the critical obsession with whether Ormond is a monster. If, as some critics see it, he is a monster, then his death is just. As discussed in the chapter on *Wieland*, the liberal enlightenment view of human nature does not recognize the reality of true human evil: Evil-doers are moral monsters from whom normal people recoil. They are aliens whose motives and actions are unfathomably perverse, mad, or savage.

Construed as a threat to all that is good and rational, these non-humans are effectively anti-humans, and as such, they provoke not sympathy but righteous violence.

Brown sets up this question of righteous killing in the penultimate meeting between Constantia and Martinette de Beauvais. In this exchange, Martinette's admirable strengths—her Wollstonecraftian development of "masculine" attainments, particularly an intellect enriched by the sciences, travel, and engagement with and activity in the manly realm of politics; her disregard for feminine false modesty, for shallow sentimentality, and for the pretenses of social convention—shade into callousness as her eminently rational convictions justify deathly calculations. She has become fixated on a vision of abstract justice and political utility. Martinette glories in recounting the killing of others in the name of defending liberty, even those whom she once "knew and loved before the revolution" (206). She declares, moreover, that she would have also gladly sacrificed her own life for the same cause. "How can the heart of women be inured to the shedding of blood?" Constantia asks. "The capacity to reason and infer, [. . .] the influence of habit," Martinette explains: "My hand never faultered when liberty demanded the victim" (206). She then boasts that she even plotted a suicidal attack on the Prussian enemy. Her plan to impersonate a banished Royalist, gain access to the Prussian general, and assassinate him before "attest[ing] her magnanimity by slaughtering herself" draws from the real life affair of the Marat assassination. "I regretted the retreat of the Prussians," Martinette concludes, "because it precluded the necessity of such a sacrifice."[126] In response, "Constantia," the narrator reports, "shuddered and drew back, to contemplate more deliberately the features of her guest. [. . .] She felt that antipathy was preparing to displace love" (207).

And yet, when her female honor is threatened by Ormond, when she faces the prospect of rape, Constantia takes the same attitude toward the shedding of blood as Martinette. In the first instant, she contemplates killing this man, whom before this night she considered a friend, just as Martinette killed her friends. Indeed, Ormond is perhaps much more than a friend. However, calculating that her attempt at direct, violent opposition may be easily counteracted, she turns to the idea of a righteous suicide: "To save a greater good by the sacrifice of life, is in my power, and that sacrifice shall be made," she declares, echoing Martinette's sentiments regarding her own willing sacrifice to a greater good, liberty (284).

But Constantia does not kill herself. Instead, she turns the knife toward Ormond and with a frenzied movement strikes a fatal blow. In killing Ormond Constantia seems to follow Martinette's example, committing an act of righteous killing that had earlier struck Constantia as repellant. Was Martinette right, then? Does Constantia's apparent emulation of the woman warrior vindicate the views that had earlier repulsed her? Paul Lewis believes the novel argues that armed resistance may be necessary for intelligent women to survive in a man's world, even if Constantia's remorse signals her and Brown's uneasiness with it. Other critics, including Kristen Comment, see a definitive rejection of Martinette's homicidal zealotry.

I suggest we consider the peculiar crisis Brown invents. Ormond's primary intent, as he explicitly states, is not to murder Constantia but to "extort" from her the womanly "gift" she has denied him (283). In direct terms, he intends to rape her. Contemplating her options, she determines that escape is impossible. Entreaty is doomed to fail, "since, in the unexampled conformation of this man's mind, [appeals to his compassion and

benevolence] were made subservient to his most flagitious designs" (283). And direct threat—she wields a penknife—is liable only to incite not deter further outrages. When she threatens to take the only option left, the sacrifice of her own life so as to preserve her honor, he confidently replies, "Living or dead, the prize I have in view shall be mine" (285).

Brown's gambit in having the ostensible villain go so far as to declare his intention to rape his victim even if she kills herself first, may stand as an example of what William Hazlitt identified as the author's carrying his "imagination (full to disease) to outrage and disgust." But just as the incest in *Wieland* has a legitimate and quite central function beyond mere titillating sensationalism, the threatened necrophilia in *Ormond* is more than an expression of fantastically monstrous evil. In Ormond's outrageous declaration, Brown literalizes not only the physical but the moral threat of the invasive, penetrative heuristic of vision, the egoistical grasping for transcendental truth. He also simultaneously exposes its monstrous absurdity. Because the self and other mutually constitute one another, the breaking of this plane between them means the elimination of both. Ormond, in his supreme arrogance, does not accept that the otherness of the other human being is inviolable. The other can of course be murdered and can be raped, but no degree of corporeal invasion can extort from it its inviolable otherness. Put another way, the "gift" (emblematized here by that that as a woman Constantia can bestow) ceases to be a gift if cynically bought or forcefully extorted.

Moreover, the threat of rape works here to complicate the ethics of Constantia's response to Ormond's intentions. That is, a more straightforward intent to kill on Ormond's part would make her violent repulsion of him a more clear-cut case of

justifiable homicide: "She remembered that to inflict death is no iniquitous exertion of self-defense. [. . .] The last extremes of opposition, the most violent expedients for defense, would be justified by being indispensable. To find safety for her honor, even in the blood of an assailant, was the prescription of duty. The equity of this species of defense, was not, in the present confusion of her mind, a subject of momentary doubt" (282, 283). But, perhaps more importantly, because she can survive the attack, Constantia has the opportunity to be the "model of right conduct" that Brown claims as the ultimate aim of serious narrative art.

Brown discusses this model in the "Walstein's School" essay, where he offers a negative example involving a heroine in a similar crisis. In his critical remarks upon Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe, a virtuous victim of rape who "died a victim of errors, scarcely less opprobrious and pernicious, than those of her tyrants and oppressors," Brown puts the focus on the virtue of fortitude, on the determination to continue to work toward the benefit of others even in the face of privations. He faults Clarissa for "depreciat[ing] the means of usefulness and pleasure of which fortune was unable to deprive her" (*Literary Essays* 38). In another essay dedicated to these views, Brown argues more expansively:

> Clarissa's *chief* calamity is of an extreme and delicate nature. I shall not pretend to investigate or settle the origin or value of a circumstance which we certainly find to be most prized by the most pure, and by those whose moral sentiments, in other respects, are the most correct. I shall merely propose, to an enlightened woman, the question, whether the immediate phrenzy, and ultimate death, of Clarissa, be, in themselves, arguments of

> virtue or vice, of fortitude or weakness? Whether, after the calamity has actually and irretrievably occurred, either moral or religious duty *enjoins* us to *live* or to *die*; to be passionate in lamentation, or serene in fortitude? Ought the evils of human life, incurred without guilt in ourselves, to occasion a grief inconsistent with life, or only to produce a *resignation* to what, *on the whole*, while the whole is under the direction of one perfect in goodness and wisdom, is *best*? [. . .]
>
> Is there any essential difference in the merits of those who suffer an external evil to destroy them instantly by dagger or poison, or slowly by heart-breaking grief? Does not our conduct, in either case, evince a disproportionate attachment to earthly and transient goods, and a disproportionate contempt or disregard for the testimony of a good conscience, and the approbation of a perfect Judge?
>
> Was it from submission to this will that she set the value which she *did* set upon the force of unjust and tyrannical relations, upon the esteem of the misjudging part of the world (for *that* part only would have withdrawn their reverence on account of her misfortunes), and on the possession of a corporeal integrity? ("Objections to Richardson's Clarissa" *Literary Essays* 100)[127]

In his "Walstein's" essay, Brown contrasts this flawed model of virtue with the hero of a novel he briefly summarizes, a novel that is in fact his own thinly-disguised *Arthur Mervyn*. The comparison is somewhat strained, for Arthur does not endure the complicated horrors of rape and its aftermath. One would think that in crafting *Ormond,*

a narrative with a more similar crisis, that Brown would simply put his heroine in Clarissa's position, that of a rape victim, but invest her with the virtues he claims for Arthur. That is, one might expect that he would give us a picture of Constantia after the assault in which her "talents are exerted to reform the vices of others, to defeat their malice when exerted to [her] injury, to endure, without diminution of [her] usefulness or happiness, the injuries which [she] cannot shun" (*Literary Essays* 38). But Brown does not have his heroine suffer rape and the loss of reputation; instead Constantia violently repulses and kills Ormond.

Some critics find this ending a sop to sentimental readers. But, I argue, it is not the action that most matters but the response to the action once it is taken. Constantia's intense feelings of guilt would suggest that she does not see Ormond as a mere monster rightfully destroyed. She does not share in the exculpatory narrative of the liberal enlightenment view and the legal exoneration it bestows. In fact, the legal exoneration, so dutifully sought by Sophia is, as we have seen, already tainted by the critique of the law earlier in the narrative. Indeed, the "formalities of justice," redolent of the use of the law as cover for the heartless confiscation of all the Dudleys owned, again suggest a kind of sanctioned self-interested violence is at the base of the ostensibly rationally objective, non-violent contractual society (292).

In fact, the reduction of the event to legal considerations is comparable to the extra-legal but still contractual model of relation by which Ormond understands both justice and love. In an anecdote about Ormond's past recounted immediately before the narrative turn to the climactic confrontation, Sophia tells of his violent quarrel with a fellow Russian soldier over who held claim to a captured Tartar girl. After killing this

friend, Ormond rapes the girl before "stab[ing] her in the heart, as an offering to the *manes* of Sarsefield, the friend whom he had slain." He follows this with more bloodshed the next morning, carrying away the heads of five enemy combatants and "cast[ing] them upon the grave of Sarsefield" as a means of further "expiate[ing] his guilt" (264). For this, the narrator reports, "the General gave him a commission in the Cossack troops" (264). Thus, not only has he fulfilled a sort of savage contractual obligation, in the process, reducing seven lives to calculations of claims and debt, he has reaped a reward for doing so.

In Ormond's words before his attempted assault upon Constantia, we see the same economy of give and take, the same mere contractual model of relation operating in his efforts to win Constantia's love. "And what recompense," he asks her, "is due to him whose vigilance pursued him hither, and made him [Craig] pay for his offences with his blood? What benefit have I received at thy hand to authorize me, for thy sake, to take away his life?" (278). He feels he is owed a debt for this gratuitous gift; and, soon after, he complains that his earlier stratagem of "summon[ing] gratitude to his aid" has failed to bring about the desired result. "To snatch you from poverty, to restore his sight to your father, were expected to operate as incentives to love," he explains. Moreover, his killing of Constantia's father, he claims, far from merely eliminating an opponent to his designs, "was a due and disinterested offering, at the altar of your felicity and mine" (281). His idea of disinterestedness, however, is indistinguishable from the idea of (and his plan for) buying Constantia's love (281).

Given that the novel has already established that we cannot avoid self-interest in all our deliberations and actions, the reader, reflecting upon Constantia's killing of her

attacker, may reasonably ask of it, is violence ever justified? To get to what I believe is the novel's answer to this, *Ormond*'s final question, I draw upon remarks by the contemporary philosopher Simon Critchley. Following Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben, Critchley asserts that the commandment 'Thou shall not kill' is not an a priori decree but an imposition of double responsibility, first, for following it and, second, for taking responsibility for not following it. In exceptional cases, killing is allowable; but never are we released from the obligation of taking responsibility:

> The commandment is not a decree that is to be followed once and for all the moment it is made. On the contrary, the commandment is something we struggle with, that we wrestle with. The moral commandment is not an a priori moral law from which we derive the a posteriori consequences. In many ways, the situation is always the reverse: we always find ourselves in a concrete socio-political-legal situation of violence and we have with a plumb-line of non-violence, of life's sanctity. There are no transcendental guarantees and no clean hands. We act, we invent.

That is, in terms of what we have seen in *Ormond*, true responsibility entails not hiding behind constructs of mere legal responsibility. It entails not redefining the act as a selfless tribute to an abstraction, like the cause of liberty. It entails not surrendering one's identity as a moral agent to some other supposed agent or mechanism, whether a divine author or a natural necessity. The argument against submitting to a priori obligations may bear something of a resemblance to the Godwinian argument against promises, which, as in Ormond's screed against the marriage contract, serves to hinder one's freedom, to preclude choosing to act or select in a way that is rational considering

new circumstances. But Brown's novel suggests he views the problem of submission to a priori obligations in terms not of its hindrance of personal freedom and of a dedication to rational deliberation but in terms of its use in the evasion of responsibility. Constantia, not constrained by an established moral system, actively engages Ormond's sometimes repellant views, as she does Martinette's. She expresses neither merely reactive, dismissive judgment nor self-effacing submission; rather she practices an ethical attention. This makes her vulnerable to Ormond's specious views and violent actions but it also gives her the power to be responsive in a way not dictated by precept or principle or mere emulation.

Faced with the choice of submission to Ormond's will (like Hellen's) or bloodshed to save a greater good (like Martinette's), Constantia actually takes a third way. Only superficially comparable to Martinette's calculated carnage, her violent repulse ("desperate and at random," "scarcely the fruit of intention," "suggested by a momentary frenzy") puts an end to her physical but not her moral crisis (291). Constantia does not share Martinette's cavalier attitude toward what she deemed righteous killing. In her reaction to the mayhem of that fateful night, the heroine, having escaped the threatened corruption of her virtue, gives ample proof that she feels far from relieved and righteous. The scene is worth recalling at some length:

> O! my friend! she answered, what have I done, what have I suffered within the last dreadful hour? The remembrance, though insupportable, will never leave me. You can do nothing for my relief. All I claim, is your compassion and your sympathy.

> I hope, said I, that nothing has happened to load you with guilt or with shame.
>
> Alas! I know not. My deed was scarcely the fruit of intention. It was suggested by a momentary frenzy. I saw no other means of escaping from vileness and pollution. I was menaced with an evil worse than death. I forbore till my strength was almost subdued: The lapse of another moment would have placed me beyond hope.
>
> My stroke was desperate and at random. It answered my purpose too well. He cast at me a look of terrible upbraiding, but spoke not. His heart was pierced, and he sunk, as if struck by lightning, at my feet. O much-erring and unhappy Ormond! That thou shouldst thus untimely perish! That I should be thy executioner!
>
> [. . .]
>
> To restore health and equanimity to my friend; to repel the erroneous accusations of her conscience; to hinder her from musing, with eternal anguish, upon this catastrophe; to lay the spirit of secret upbraiding by which she was incessantly tormented; which bereft her of repose; empoisoned all her enjoyments, and menaced, not only, the subversion of her peace, but the speedy destruction of her life, became my next employment. (291)

Clearly, Constantia is devastated by Ormond's death and her role in bringing it about.

Is this a tragic ending for our heroine? Although she survives, her honor and life intact, she has in a sense lost, at least for a time, her independence, her ability to stand out

against the two-dimensional background that comprises the mindset in question here. In the aftermath of the fatal encounter, we first see her as Sophia sees her while peering through the keyhole of the locked door: "A figure, with difficulty recognized to be that of my friend, now appeared in sight. Her hands were clasped on her breast, her eyes wildly fixed upon the ceiling and streaming with tears, and her hair unbound and falling confusedly over her bosom and neck" (289). A convergence of forces—Ormond's actions, Sophia's counsels, and arguably her own virtue—brought her to this moment and move her into the pose of a figure in a historical painting. She seems forced into (imprisoned in?) the realm of two-dimensional art just as other characters seemed to step out from that realm and move freely between different "real and assumed characters" (117).[128]

Tellingly, her voice disappears from the narrative as Sophia takes over and stage manages the official response to these events. The men she called upon to help her rescue Constantia from her imprisonment, the sinewy sons and servants of the farmer, "powerless with terror," as she tells the reader, turned to her for "direction" and "willingly performed whatever [she] thought proper to enjoin upon them" (291). She dispatches the caretaker with a letter to the magistrate and overlooks the execution of the "formalities of justice," which include a "hastily formed" tribunal that "exercis[ed] its functions on the spot" (292). Although perfunctory, for as Sophia asserts, "her act was prompted by motives which every scheme of jurisprudence known in the world not only exculpates but applauds," these procedures elicit in Constantia an almost unconquerable reluctance.

Sophia's concluding remarks, directly addressing the still unidentified I. E. Rosenberg, remind the reader that this is a history, that it is an artful representation of reality intended for use in determining truth, value, and (implicitly) a future action: in this case, whether to enter into a marriage contract. Note that the decision is now not considered from Constantia's point of view as it was several times earlier in the narrative. Constantia becomes a fixed entity: "Since her arrival in England, the life of my friend has experienced little variation" (293). She is fixed by Sophia's narrative that defines and confines her, or at least it would appear so.

But one could argue that in her reluctance to cooperate with Sophia's efforts to secure her exemption from "legal animadversion" and her resistance to her friend's strenuous consolations, she thinks, feels, and acts from a place outside the narrow constructs of abstract systems and mere reasoning and, finally, even her own approbation. In the end, although she maintains her "corporeal integrity" by defeating Ormond, Constantia's enlightened education, her republican virtue, and, yes, her constancy prove to be not enough to preserve her clear conscience. But it is exactly in not trying to preserve a clear conscience that she preserves her innocence.

Chapter 4: "The Most Efficacious of Moral Instruments": Brown's Literary Theory

Self-intensifying reverberations echo through the halls and the heads of *Wieland*'s Mettingen, shattering the planes between the figurative and the literal, between passion and reason, and between body and mind. The same play with dichotomies and focus on their moral implications feature in the drama that unfolds on a larger stage in *Ormond*, where no proscenium separates theatrical and social fictions, artistic and factual representations. Both of these novels put into question prevalent modes of understanding the world and of situating oneself within it. And both demonstrate that the nominal truths upon which we base our judgments and justify our actions are subject to the distortions created when in our jealous defense of a sense of reality and of a certain conception of our self we reject what cannot be accommodated into our worldview. Even characters' self-conscious efforts to mitigate the effects of these distortions can become in turn a means of merely seeking selfish ends, perhaps satisfying personal desires or obtaining a clear conscience or both, rather than a truer understanding and more truly ethical responsiveness.

In contrast to the rationalism and conventional didacticism underlying the popular Gothic and seduction narratives from which he borrowed, Brown's disturbing novels center on atrocities committed by intelligent, principled people laboring for what they conceive of as an ultimate good. Human error and vice as presented in *Wieland* and *Ormond* emerge not simplistically as the chance introduction of random flaw or the active intervention of a principle of evil. They are born, these works suggest, of the habitual and arduous attempt—implicitly common to all human beings but perhaps particularly acute and conspicuous in Brown's revolutionary Atlantic world—to reduce

all phenomena to comprehension, to make experience adequate to our categories. Theodore Wieland, perhaps, best exemplifies this drive to assimilate into a comprehensive whole even extraordinary violations of the assumed cosmic order; upon hearing that Carwin had been counterfeiting the seemingly otherworldly voices, he falters only a moment in his conviction before folding this too back into his ego-centric narrative of a contest between angels and demons to claim his soul. But Brown does not narrowly target revealed religion; contrary to what might be expected from a reader of radical Enlightenment philosophies, rationality, too, plays a large part in the devastations of *Wieland*. And, of course, his follow-up novel portrays the monstrous schemes of the supremely rational Ormond as he lays claim to penetrative insight into hidden realities.

Foundational truth, the object of both religious teachings and philosophical inquiry, however conceived, is understood as the principle that constitutes and governs the universe. Given the premise that one's knowledge, being, and moral duty consists in one's relation and responsiveness to a foundational truth, a logos, the bizarre and often destructive behavior of Brown's characters makes a kind of sense within the logic of their worldviews. And yet the novels' sensational plots dramatically demonstrate that the search for this foundational truth, this ultimate reality, whether cosmic reason or the mind or will of God, can never yield certainty. And in as much as dedication to seeking out and adhering to this ultimate reality takes priority over humane considerations in our engagements with other human beings, this search is liable to give birth to, at the very least, ethically questionable judgments and actions and at worst moral abominations.

Although grounded by an Enlightenment aversion to the miraculous, by a dedication to probabilities and to the known principles of nature and human conduct (as

Brown asserts in the preface to *Wieland*), Brown nevertheless underscores the intellectual and ethical imperative of suspending certitude. Whether his characters are right about the truth or cause of some appearance or event and whether they espouse reason or faith or sensibility or some other source or means of knowing is less important than the attitude of certainty they bring to their judgments and responses. Certitude is what makes one vulnerable to deception; a deceiver need only create those appearances that serve as the bases for one's certain belief, as Craig does when he forges the letter from Dudley's English friend, placing himself beyond all doubt in his employer's eyes—or more disastrously, as Carwin does when he creates the illusion of a disembodied intelligence mediating between the world of man and the realm of the supernatural. And, as exhibited most spectacularly in Theodore Wieland's and Ormond's merciless rationalizations, it is certitude that allows for an unethical disregarding of the otherness of others, a preclusion of the inherent mystery of experience, a shutting out of the possibility of new significance as experience unfolds and our perceptions, if allowed, evolve. Certitude, or at least an unreflective habit of mind, is also the precondition for the disruptions of the grotesque. Such disruptions, shocking, confusing, ridiculous, and even painful as they may be, may offer the possibility, at least, of changing one's approach to truth and of gaining an understanding from outside the limitations of one's conceptual horizon. This holds true for the characters' experiencing grotesque persons and events (although most seem to fail to take up the opportunity); and it holds true for the readers of these grotesque works as well.

As already noted, critics of the past few decades have observed that Brown's radical skepticism, his outlook regarding the discoverability of a foundational truth,

shares a strong family resemblance to prominent intellectual currents of the past half century or so that challenge the very idea of apodictic truths and of a language adequate to conveying them. A number of readings of Brown's works draw parallels to poststructuralism; and several more, without reference to poststructuralist thinkers and terminology, similarly explore the manner in which Brown's novels illustrate the instability, indeterminacy, and internal contradictions of seemingly monolithic terms and concepts, thus undermining any claim to ultimate reality.[129] In some cases, critical explorations of the texts' relentless indeterminacy find that Brown fails to discover and offer any alternative ground for morality or social justice and just government.[130] Several other readings, however, see the novels' epistemological critique serving as a means of opening up a space for new ideas and pointing out the possibility of other constructions of what is true, logical, and natural, thereby implicitly advocating for a more inclusive and equitable approach to political and juridical decision-making.

My aim in this chapter, is to follow up on my sense that Brown's writings evince a focus on the ethical groundwork, on that which although it may serve as a starting point for reforming social and political structures, or systems, is not primarily political in the narrow sense. Brown's novels do not conform to or advance a political theory or system. Nor for that matter are Brown's novels reducible to moral propositions or formal philosophical discourse more generally. I want to argue that the novels' resistance to a totalizing explanatory construct serves to prompt a mode of continuous critical engagement, a living practice of attentive reading that is, when transposed into the realm of interpersonal relations, the active awareness and ethical regarding of the other in its true otherness. As such, the novels' very weirdness—their inconclusiveness, incongruity,

and contradictions, in content and form; that which, I have suggested is best understood as their grotesqueness; that which commands attention and resists assimilation—serves an ethical end.

In this chapter I hope to show how Brown's weird novels build upon but move beyond ideas he inherited and those he encountered in the intellectually volatile era of the late Enlightenment. Drawing upon a number of Brown's other writings and considering them within their historical and biographical context, I trace the sources and development of his thoughts on the relation of morality, truth, and narrative art. In particular, I consider how his letters and his magazine pieces, reviews and essays written during and after his novel-writing period, express elements of what I take to be the novels' nuanced and cohesive attitude toward the self's relation to and responsibility for the other.

"An Outcast of That Unwarlike Sect"

A biography of the aesthetic, intellectual, and ethical values or ethos animating Brown's literary project may well begin with his birth into the Philadelphia community of the Society of Friends. His membership in the Quaker community shaped Brown's socio-economic circumstances, his friendships, and his education. It shaped to some extent his language. (All those "not un-" constructions [the indirect or non-committal assertions through negation] and other circumlocutions ["wide of beauty" instead of *ugly*] might be creditable to a particular Quaker care to avoid disputation.) It shaped, as well, his moral and intellectual bent of mind. The early-to-mid 1790s for Brown is generally depicted as a youthful turn toward the radical ideas then sweeping through the Atlantic world—and indeed their impact on him and many other thoughtful people was profound. "Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!" wrote

Wordsworth, reflecting upon these early years of the French Revolution (*Prelude* book XI). But Quaker historian Richard P. Moses rejects the binary opposition envisioned by some literary scholars between Brown's religious upbringing and his later immersion in liberal intellectual currents, asserting instead that his intellectual curiosity and liberality are outgrowths of his Quakerism.[131] And upon closer inspection, it does seem that despite the obvious divide separating the Christian sect from the often irreligious reformers with whom Brown is most often and rather justly compared, their tenets are not very far apart. Indeed, a curious fact attests to the affinity of Quaker thought and some radical philosophies of the decade: Even before the Friendly Club's enthusiastic canvassing of English Jacobin writings, Elijah Brown, the author's Quaker father, copied into his commonplace book passages from William Godwin's *Political Justice*, Mary Wollstonecraft's *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, and Robert Bage's *Man as He Is*.[132] Of course, the strong connection between our author's works and that of these and other such writers is and was easily discernible. John Neal, a novelist of the succeeding generation, called Brown "the Godwin of America" (qtd. in Verhoeven 17). And almost twenty years before, an 1805 German edition of *Ormond* (perhaps the first American novel translated into another language) is wrongly, if perhaps intentionally, ascribed to the famous William Godwin. But the shift from religious communitarian to secular cosmopolitan does not essentially alter some core beliefs; a through-line remains. Some years after Brown's novelistic phase and after his disownment for marrying outside the Society, in what would be the last year before his untimely death, Brown referenced his Quaker background and its life-long influence on him:

> There are others who will pass me by as a visionary: And some, observing the city where I thus make my appearance, may think my pacific doctrine, my system of rational forbearance and forgiveness carried to a pitch of *Quaker* extravagance. The truth is, I am no better than an outcast of that unwarlike sect, but cannot rid myself of reverence for most of its practical and political maxims. I feel a strong inclination to admit to an equality of rights and merits, men of all nations and religions; to pass the same sentence on the same conduct, even though the men who practice it bear, at one time, the name of French, at another of English, and at another of American: Sometimes that of federalists, and sometimes that of republicans.[133]

Here can be seen Brown's peculiar and compelling blend of brotherly love and justice: impartiality steeped not in disinterested deliberation or religious revelation but in an extravagant concern for the well-being and respect for the alterity of the other, of all others.

Nor are these merely the effusions of shallow sentiment. Brown's egalitarianism and non-partisan principles take their original force from the Quaker ideas—redoubled and extended by his reading of Godwin and others—regarding authority and conscience. As part of a larger sphere of English Dissenters, Quakers were objectors to what was seen as the incomplete reformation of the Anglican church and its retention of elements of Roman Catholicism deemed un-Biblical and contrary to the true Christianity of the early church. Although varying widely in their particular beliefs, the many sects of English Dissenters (or Non-conformists) commonly opposed the enforcement of church doctrine

and organization through state power and were barred in the mid-seventeenth century from holding public office by the Test Act and other laws targeting both Roman Catholics and Non-conformists.[134] A principle tenet of the Society of Friends, which traces its origins to mid-seventeenth century northern England, is the rejection of adherence to any external authority on religious matters in favor of being open to being moved by God through an "inner light," a spark of God's divinity that resides in everyone. The lack of a creed and of a church hierarchy (meetings were not led by priests or ministers) foster a personal relation to the divine not beholden to any intermediating power. During the eighteenth century, Quaker meetings consisted of members sitting in contemplative silence until one among them felt the "inner light" leading him or her to speak (sex as well as race and class were not recognized as religiously significant distinctions). Conscious of the problem of knowing whether the leading is done by the divine, by the ego, or some other source, members engaged in conscientiously non-confrontational questioning, healthily skeptical but always mindful of their core belief in the priesthood of all believers, the belief that divine truth may speak through anyone and may not always accord with majority opinion.[135] Further, such expressions of divine truth are understood as part of the on-going, continuous revelation of God's will. And the principle that no one individual or group is in possession of a final truth is the source of the famous Quaker traits of humility, kindness, and attentiveness to others; it is also the rationale for their characteristic rejection of all the trappings (gestures, clothing, or language) of social inequality. Thus, while the Society of Friends bequeathed to Brown a tradition of challenging the claims of any authority to mediate between the individual and the great unknown, it also gave him a progressive

ideal of a community moving forward together, a "fellowship of the Spirit," as an eminent modern Quaker historian puts it, "a movement that can and does grow, develop, and change because it has within it the inward power of expansion."[136] For Quakers, the ethical importance of authority and conscience lies not only in the imperative to honor one's own authentic moral convictions but also, and importantly, in the idea of maintaining an openness to a continuous revelation that may come through anyone.[137] Quakerism thus more than adequately prepared Brown's mind for the moral and political theories of the radical democrats and rational reformers, particularly of their champion William Godwin. In an 1805 article entitled "Origins of Quakerism," written in part by Brown and published in his *Literary Magazine*, the narrator marks the striking parallels:

> Those who deem the simple or popular form of government the best, fancy that they see in the policy of the quakers the purest and most perfect model of this government. It is very remarkable, indeed, that in the internal order of this society, in its legislative and judicial system, we see the most extravagant *political* reveries of Godwin and his followers realized. The division of the whole society into bodies sufficiently small to allow all legislative functions to be performed by the whole community assembled, without distinctions of rank, property, or even of *sex;* the deliberations of their public bodies, without any of those forms deemed indispensable by all other senates; decision in these assemblies accomplished *without vote*, or appeal to a majority; judicial powers united with the legislative, exercised without precise statutes, and executed without corporal

> punishment of any kind, are all characteristic of quaker as well as of Godwinian policy.[138]

Godwin (1756-1836), a one-time Nonconformist minister who embraced atheism and philosophical materialism under the influence of the writings of French *philosophes*, argued for remaining always open to the dictates not of the divine spark, but of the light of reason. In his movement away from the theism of the Dissenters, one could argue, Godwin took their freethinking principles to heart by taking them further. Just as Dissenter principles might be thought to be the logical extension of the Protestant Reformation regarding the primacy of individual conscience in religious matters, Godwin's ideas, as Mark Philp argues, might be thought to be the logical extension of this primacy of conscience "to encompass all aspects of moral and political life."[139] Indeed, Godwin, armed with the conviction of the capacity of humankind to apprehend universal truth, envisioned the eventual obsolescence of government itself as individuals would work out conflicts through the exercise of reason in private judgment and public discussion.

And, like the Quakers, Godwin conceived of a continuous progression in understanding and moral being, not a final state of perfection. He conceived of this capacity for ever-further development, however, in narrowly intellectual terms, not only rejecting the need for religious doctrines or divine revelations, but also taking a Stoical approach to emotions, treating them as corrupters of reason and of the impartial calculations of utility, that is, of the greatest good for mankind. To his mind the continuous approach to truth by way of dispassionate reasoning would also necessarily entail the continuous approach to true morality. As Paul McLaughlin explains, in

Godwin's view, "not only is intellectual (or theoretical) progress necessary for moral (or practical) progress; it even guarantees it (889): 'That which we can be persuaded clearly and distinctly to approve, will inevitably modify our conduct'" (135). And Philp notes that "far from separating the spheres of ideas and motives, the understanding and the passions, Godwin treated sensations merely as raw forms of idea, and thereby made possible a view in which the understanding could come to master and direct the passions and the organs of sensation," a view that, as I have already argued, Brown critiques in his narrative of the Wieland-Pleyel group.[140] This dispassionate ideal, however, is central to Godwin's focus on true justice, on a first-order impartiality.

In a defining move, Godwin, in fact, explicitly rejects the doctrine of the natural rights of man as treated by Thomas Paine and others, arguing instead for the same freedom from external interference only not from an appeal to an abstract absolute but from the necessary conclusions of disinterested reason and enlightened self-interest. He conceived of the freedom from interfering elements as allowing and indeed imposing the duty of each individual to recognize his or her own responsibilities. Freedom is not the end goal but the space from which one can discern and exercise one's moral duty to the greater good.[141]

Just what that greater good may be would be discerned through the exercise of private judgment as chastened and made more correct through public discussion. Godwin acknowledged the frailty of human character, its susceptibility to false logic and the corrupting influence of personal interest, and endorsed the corrective of earnest public discussion whether in speech or writing. We might easily assume Godwin is borrowing directly from the Quakers, merely substituting *the common faculty reason* for *the inner*

light, when he argues: "All men are partakers of the common faculty reason, and may be supposed to have some communication with the common preceptor truth. It would be wrong in an affair of such momentous concern, that any chance for additional wisdom should be rejected; nor can we tell in many cases till after the experiment how eminent any individual may one day be found in the business of guiding and deliberating for his fellows" (III. iv. 91). And this benevolent business, Godwin argues, is carried on through "discussion," "the only substantial method for the propagation of truth," for through discussion "the errors of one man may be detected by the acuteness and severe disquisition of his neighbours" (III. vii. 105). In this, the Quaker emphasis on plain expression and candor mirrors the radical democrats' beliefs concerning the virtue and, importantly, the transformative power of sincerity. Caleb Crain observes, "Godwin may not have been as mystical as the Quakers, but he shared their belief that heartfelt speech would spread love. [. . .] Almost religiously, Godwin believed that the release of the truth would lead inevitably to what the Quakers would have called a Society of Friends" (87-88). Godwin conceived of a political and juridical structure based on consensus, the convergence of ideas by means of the universal operation of reason toward a "single and uniform" truth.[142] And this faith in the power of peaceful exchange to resolve conflict is another commonality of eighteenth-century Quaker and Godwinian principles. Although considered the father of anarchist thought, Godwin expressly rejected violent revolution and advocated for a continuous dialogue among truth seekers that would in effect be an on-going and bloodless revolution.[143] Looking far into the future of this ideal progression, he projected that an enlightened mankind will overcome not only social ills, "the vices and moral weakness of man," but even the physical limitations and

vulnerabilities of the mortal body, achieving a kind of secular immortality.[144] Godwin's supreme confidence in the power of reason to disclose eternal truth, including the eternal truth of moral duty, proved highly infectious, for a time.

"Infidel Philosopher"

Selections of Godwin's philosophical magnum opus *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* may have reached Brown by way of lengthy extracts published in New York newspapers as early as 1793, soon after its London publication, just as he was breaking from the expectations of his family and friends in quitting the law, in questioning religious doctrine, and in taking on the quixotic pursuit of a career as a professional writer.[145] In this period from the middle to the latter part of the decade, Brown espoused the "infidel philosophy" of his New York-based friends Elihu Smith, William Johnson, and William Dunlap. The phrase, referring to their critical stance toward religion and their progressive reform interests in line with the radicals of Europe, is one Johnson playfully co-opted from the title of a counter-subversive, anti-Illuminati work *The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy* by prominent Congregationalist divine (and friendly acquaintance of Smith) Timothy Dwight.[146] These energetic, educated, and hopeful young men were among many inspired by a materialist and individualist conception of an inner light, not the flashes of divine revelation, but the light of reason illuminating the path toward eternal truth. In his biography of his late friend, Dunlap, writing from a period of conservative backlash against revolutionary zeal, against the undermining of ordering systems, treats as a matter meriting some apology Brown's embrace of the thought and spirit of Revolutionary-era

reformers, of the "plunging tenets and dangerous doctrines which he advanced in his first entry into public life" (*Life* 71).

> Ever fond of analysis, Charles, even in very early life, would take no opinion upon trust. He found in his own mind abundant reason to reject many of the received opinions of mankind, and to doubt the reality of many facts upon which those opinions are founded. Much of his reading at this time tended to bewilder rather than enlighten and to confirm his predisposition to skepticism. In common with many others, he imputed to wrong causes the defects which are but too apparent in existing systems. He saw the wrong and injustice and evil which exist, and instead of attributing them to the ignorance and selfishness of individuals, he assigned as the cause the errors or inefficiency of those codes which are intended to enlighten or to restrain. (70)

It seems that the inveterately skeptical Brown found something relatable in the cogent critiques of old systems founded on arbitrary distinctions and perpetuated through obfuscation and superstition, and something compelling in the possibility of systematizing or scaling up his skepticism so as to remake the world, to turn doubt and refutation into something constructive.

Perhaps the most explicit record of Brown's conversion to Godwinian thought is his October 1795 letter to Joseph Bringhurst, Jr., his long-time Philadelphia friend, former classmate, and fellow Quaker. In this letter Brown continues an on-going controversy between them on the topic of theism and morality, exemplifying along the way his characteristic skepticism toward the uniformity and stability of terms and the

decidability of meaning: "How ambiguous is the meaning of that word? [Christianity] How difficult to ascertain its true meaning? You talk of it as if you thoroughly understood it; You are aware that there are a thousand sects in the world, who call themselves Christians, who differ essentially from each other in their practical and speculative creed. [. . .] Have you determined which of these is the true?" "The question between us," Brown declares, "is not whether I condemn Christianity, but whether I condemn your *system* of Christianity" (*Letters* 297-98). He finds the belief in the divinity of Christ (more particularly the concomitant unquestioning submission to the moral law conceived in his name) and the prospect of future reward or punishment in an afterlife to be pernicious, historically responsible for far more harm than good. And he notes that these doctrines are not uniformly adopted by all those who profess to be Christians. Deference to scripture, he argues, cannot avoid the problem of interpretation. The errors committed under sanction of religion, his friend must argue, are a matter of annexing "the sanctions of the Christian religion to modes of conduct and opinion to which you think it is inapplicable." But such susceptibility to misinterpretation when coupled with "imagined rewards and punishments hereafter," Brown offers in pointed understatement, can make for "an error of no little importance" (300). As to whether Brown's moral principles, despite his positions on doctrine, do or do not accord with what Bringhurst "will esteem a just and natural construction of the language of the New testament," Brown asserts that he must still insist that "religious sanctions are unfriendly to morality" (301).[147] The problem of interpretation, he continues, must discredit reliance upon religious law: "The Construction of one of us only can be true: One of us must commit actions positively wrong; with the additional incitement that they are sanctioned by

Heaven: And what shall I think of the Utility of motives which may operate with equal force with respect to opposite actions and which are infinitely more in danger of being applied erroneously than rightly, of inciting to evil than to good." And as to admitting "with Archdeacon Paley the necessity of Revelation to point out to men their duty, and enforce their performance of it," Brown finds it a "strange concession" (301). (He would later also find it a generative topic for a novel.) In rejecting deference to any authority, including sacred scripture and revelation, he takes the decisive step from Dissent to deism.[148]

Following the lead of the era's rational humanism, and particularly of Godwin's brand, he seeks a system of morality that accords with the best human understanding; he looks with some optimism not to the grace of God but to the mind of man to disclose the true morality. The "chief business" of man, Brown tells Bringhurst, "is to ascertain the dictates of moral duty, by consulting his Understanding; and measuring the opinions of others, whatever may be their pretensions, by the standard of his own judgment." In Godwinian fashion, he insists upon the free exercise of the individual's reason and argues that the path toward knowledge of one's duty lay in reflection, which he is careful to point out necessitates "the belief of the possible erroneousness of our present conclusions" (302).[149] He then ends his remarks by earnestly referring Bringhurst to Godwin, the "author, to whom, in my present mode of thinking, I appeal, as an oracle" (302).[150] Tellingly, although to his Quaker friend Brown presents a vigorous defense of this oracle's pronouncements, including the appeal to "Utility" and one's own private judgment, in practice at least, as we shall see, he is not Godwinian enough for his deist friend Elihu Hubbard Smith. In the repeated allusions to the variability of definitions and

the problem of interpretation is the intimation of a difference whose significance will become evident over time as his predisposition to skepticism outgrows the idealistic hopes he placed in a Godwinian system.

However, despite some early signs of an eventual philosophical divergence, the importance of William Godwin's works from the mid-1790s on Brown's development as an aspiring author, of a "story-telling moralist," cannot be denied. It was around this time that Brown declared his intention to write a novel after reading Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), a thriller meant to render in dramatic narrative form the proto-anarchist's critique of outmoded and unjust structures of authority. "I had planned so that I could finish a work equal in extent to *Caleb Williams* in less than six weeks," Brown writes in a letter to Dunlap in September, 1795. But upon experiment he decides that "great expedition does not seem desirable. Tenets so momentous require a leisurely and deep examination; and much meditation, reading, and writing, I presume, are necessary to render my system of morality perfect in all its parts, and to acquire a full and luminous conviction; but I have not stopped—I go on, though less precipitately than at first, and hope finally to produce something valuable for its utility" (*Letters* 293). After a few arduous weeks, however, he decided he could not finish the task—neither completing the novel nor, presumably, perfecting his system of morality. Some months later, describing the intellectual inconstancy of his friend, Elihu Smith exclaims, "Godwin came, and all was light!" (*Letters* 343) before lamenting what he sees as Brown's frequent backsliding into (to borrow Wil Verhoeven's apt phrase) "Rousseauesque sensibility and self-absorption" ("This Blissful Period" 18).

The meticulous and disciplined Smith conducted his own prodigious industry by the light of Godwin's *Political Justice*; and through Smith, Godwin's influence seems to have been both reinforced and also perhaps overextended, strengthening some elements in Brown's views and simultaneously putting others into question. It seemed to Smith that what needed to be reinforced in Brown was the commitment to more active involvement with what lay beyond his direct personal concerns, a turn outward that would benefit himself as much as others by compelling a greater rigor in his writing and thinking. Implicit in Smith's many activities in publishing, in scientific and social-reform societies, and in the establishment and running of the Friendly Club are the Godwinian convictions regarding man's capacity for continuous improvement (in Godwin's terms "perfectibility") and his moral duty to spread enlightenment (the gospel of reason) throughout his sphere of influence. During the long period of Brown's literary wanderings, Smith, putting these convictions into action, coaxed, corrected, even castigated Brown for what he saw as an indulgence in Wertherian posing and self-mythologizing and an inability to see a project all the way through to completion. In a lengthy letter from 1796, he criticizes his friend for imprecision and possibly even deliberate obscurity in his writing, in particular concerning a letter just received in which Brown intimates some great emotional crisis in only the most abstract terms and alludes so elliptically to the fact of a mutual friend's imprisonment for debts that an exasperated Smith feels compelled to demand plain speech. He then proceeds to admonish him more generally:

> Why do you so much delight in Mystery? Is it the disease of the Will? Or of Habit? Do you, of choice, give to the simplest circumstance the air of

> fiction? Or have you been so long accustomed to deal in visionary scenes, to intertwine the real with the imaginary, & to enwrap yourself in the mantle of ambiguous seeming, that your pen, involuntarily borrows the phraseology of fancy, & by the spell of magic words, still diffuses round you the mist of obscuring uncertainty? The man of Truth, Charles! The pupil of Reason, has no mysteries. He knows that former errors, do not constitute him guilty now—& he has nothing to conceal. He seeks only to know his duty, & perform it, & he has no occasion for disguise. He places, with his own hand, the window in his breast; & he bids the world look in, & comment. Lurks there any deformity within—he blesses the eye that descries it, commends the tongue that proclaims, & kisses the hand that drags it to the light. He acknowledges his error; he owns his weakness; he purifies his heart; & he invigorates his hands. (*Letters* 333)

Brown responded conscientiously, thanking his friend for the frank assessment and well-meant advice.[151] In an insightful examination of this crucial relationship in the author's life, scholar Caleb Crain observes that here Smith's aim is to call out Brown for evading uncomfortable disclosures and confrontations through emotional posturing and flights of romantic fancy and to inculcate in him the virtue of sincere expression. Crain credits Smith's candor, compelled by intellectual principle and delivered in the spirit of true friendship, with helping his friend channel his errant fictionality into actual fictions.

And yet, as influential as Smith was on his friend's development, Brown did not, as Crain also notes, simply become a copy of this sober-minded, methodical man of

Truth, pupil of Reason. Brown's *Wieland* and *Ormond*, as we have seen, evince the view that the good doctor's prescription is rather too high-minded and dismissive of inveterate human frailties, limitations, dependencies, and perversions. And while both Brown's novels and his magazine pieces suggest an agreement with Smith's assessment of the relative values of obfuscation and openness, they question the idea of truly separating the real and the imaginary; and they question Smith's (and Godwin's) blind faith in the human capacity for rationality and in reason's power to cure the "disease" of delusion and deception.[152] Although he would, throughout his career, evince his belief in the moral duty to grow in understanding and to promote general virtue and happiness, a belief that was strengthened and set into motion by his friends in New York, and particularly by Smith, Brown would take a different view of the ease even the possibility of waving away the "mist of obscuring uncertainty."

Smith's faith in the discoverability, communicability and progressive nature of truth operated well beyond his interventions in Brown's personal development, powering his many ambitious benevolent endeavors. His establishment of the conversation circle he called the Friendly Club was, like the Gothic fiction Brown would draw upon, another example of the young republic's appropriation for its own purposes of cultural forms from across the Atlantic. Scholar Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan explains that in the absence of the raison d'etre of similar associations in monarchial England—a site of criticism and civic resistance to absolute authority and rigid social stratification—, the American associations of wit, learning, taste, and polite discourse in the first two decades of the new United States transformed into something else. When subjects became citizens and political disagreement became institutionalized into an electoral and party

system, the associations became a sort of antidote to partisan gridlock, a ground for the "exchange of ideas and the creation of bonds of affection and trust that the American polity demanded but failed to create" (4). Of the rationale behind the activities of the Friendly Club, she writes, "In Smith's view, individuals created harmony and pursued justice through acquiring and circulating information. The information they gathered would reveal the truth of any problem and its best solution. Thus, in Smith's view, the world—and the American nation within it—would be improved, not through electoral politics and partisan debate, but through a kind of open-ended intellectual exertion that rendered political parties unnecessary" (7). Smith hoped, in other words, to promote the large-scale remodeling of American society as a cosmopolitan republic of intellect.[153]

To this end Smith and other members made plans for two magazines to disseminate useful information and ideas and to serve as forums for intellectual exchange. The first, which Smith co-edited along with two other physician members, Edward Miller and Samuel Latham Mitchell, was the *Medical Repository*, the country's first enduring medical journal; and the second, the *Monthly Magazine, and American Review*. As Alfred Weber writes, this second endeavor, which Smith did not live to see, "was to cover—incredible as it may sound—all the other interests of the Friendly Club."[154] Thus, after a year as a steady supplier of material to James Watter's *Weekly Magazine*, Brown found a new outlet for expressing and developing his thoughts. He served as editor and often the biggest contributor to the eighteen issues, which were published between April 1799 and December 1800. And he would later edit two more periodicals, the *Literary Magazine and American Register* (1803-1807) and *American*

Register, or General Repository of History, Politics, and Science (1807-1809), which would feature scores more of Brown's original writings.

There seems a certain irony in the outcome of Smith's efforts to keep his friend on the intellectual straight and narrow. In goading Brown's industry, in including Brown in the weekly meetings of his conversation circle where ideas were discussed and where his writings were critiqued, and finally in bequeathing to him an outlet for projecting his ideas and putting them into action, he did indeed promote the more considered development of the author's thinking. But just as the tenets of the Society of Friends gave a certain direction to Brown's thought that under the impetus of his restless mind and the influence of his readings carried him beyond their boundaries, Smith's efforts, it seems, occasioned Brown's progression through and beyond the Godwin-inflected philosophy of his Friendly Club companion.

Close as the two were, there remains a contrast between them regarding the methods and aims of narrative, regarding the nature and relation of truth and the ethical. In his major fiction, as previous chapters have attempted to demonstrate, Brown will challenge the discoverability of an eternal truth, as well as the necessary causal connection between and the progressive nature of reason and morality. He will challenge as well the need to overcome emotions and considerations of pleasure and pain for the sake of impartial judgment and, indeed, will challenge the rational mind's capacity to do so. And he will also challenge the belief that the true origin of human actions is the individual's judgment, that "the will is the tool of the understanding," as Clara Wieland puts it. Turning to his works of criticism and literary theory to follow the ideas that inform his novels, one finds the semblance of Quaker and Godwinian principles, a Hume-

like skepticism, some French *philosophe* thought, as well as bits of German aesthetics. As different and even incompatible as these thought systems are in some particulars, Brown makes of them a cohesive approach to the pursuit of truth, the role of imagination, and the function of fiction in a new republic and in the life of the individual moral being.

"The Highest Province of Benevolence"

Although never combined into a fully developed, complete, or systematic statement, fragments of Brown's theory of literature and of its ethical force emerge in a number of essays, literary reviews, and other writings. Throughout his career as arguably the first literary critic of note in America he repeatedly emphasizes the "moral utility" of narrative art and provides details of his own methodology for achieving the aesthetic and ethical goals of his literary project.[155] At first glance, we might find his periodical writings, like his novels, contradictory; that is, they seem to be offering strands of both conservative and progressive, neo-classicist and Romantic notions of literary merit and social value. Ernest Marchand, writing in the 1930s, characterizes Brown's works of literary criticism as neo-classicist in matters of style and reflective of middle-class morality in matters of content.[156] And this view seems in line with some readings of Brown's literary practice. As already noted, a number of critics find in his major novels a pattern of punishing artists, aesthetes, and those who give themselves over to conceptions beyond sober, rationally-grounded constructions of reality. Leslie Fiedler, Michael Davitt Bell, William Manly, and others discern a conservative cultural and psychological critique regarding the potentially dangerous effects of novel-reading and the indulgence of the imagination more broadly. Other critics, including Paul Witherington, Maurice J. Bennett, and Bill Christophersen, explore what they see as a profound ambivalence

toward the author's own profession. Doubtless, evidence for Brown's negative view of popular novels or romances (he seems to have used the terms interchangeably) can be found in select magazine pieces. His brief "A Receipt for a Modern Romance," for example, offers mocking instructions for composing a gothic thriller: "Take an old castle; pull down part of it, and allow the grass to grow on the battlements, and provide the owls and bats with uninterrupted habitations among the ruins. Pour a sufficient quantity of heavy rain upon the hinges and bolts of the gates so that when they are attempted to be opened, they may creak most fearfully" (*Literary Essays* 8-9). Written later and in a more serious tone, the article "Terrific Novels" continues his disdain for "the folly of this mode of composition," which exploits "exploded fables and childish fears," by disparaging its often feeble attempts at evoking suspense and its relentless barrage of frightful incidents, which does not permit "the unhappy reader to draw his breath, or to repose for a moment on subjects of character or sentiment" (*Literary Essays* 143-44).

And yet even in his negative critical remarks, Brown does not join in the critique of popular literature that ridiculed its appeal to the imagination and to emotions generally.[157] Indeed, in the pieces just noted he mocks and chides not the Gothic writers' sensational scenarios, only their unimaginative reliance on formula and their crude handling of the genre's affective aims. In another piece, "Novel-Reading," an essay in the form of a brief fictional dialogue, a well-read Miss D— presents a retort to the era's anti-novel screeds, arguing:

> They who prate about the influence of novels to unfit us for solid and useful reading, are guilty of a double error: for in the first place, a just and powerful picture of human life in which the connection between vice and

> misery, and between felicity and virtue is vividly portrayed, is the most solid and useful reading that a moral and social being (exclusive of particular cases and professional engagements) can read; and in the second place, the most trivial and trite of these performances are, to readers of certain ages and intellects, the only books which they will read. If they were not thus employed, they would be employed in a way still more trivial or pernicious. (*Literary Essays* 136)

Crito, as the woman calls her interlocutor (a stand-in for Brown's readers whose Platonic cognomen implicitly positions Miss D— as the convincing, right-thinking Socrates), grants his general assent to her views, qualifying only her assertion regarding the rarity of "profligate" novels. He then adds his pronouncement that "my fancy has received more delight, my heart more humanity, and my understanding more instruction from a few novels I could name, than from any other works; and that the merit of a score or two of these is, in my apprehension, so great, that they are the first and principal objects to which I would direct the curiosity of a child or pupil of mine" (136). Perhaps there is an element of an early American novelist's self-promotion or self-defense in this argument, but Miss D—'s views are also recognizably part of a line of thought regarding the usefulness of fiction's moral demonstrations that goes back at least as far as Aristotle's comments on the nature of fable and can be seen in the defense of imaginative writings offered by Lord Kames and Hugh Blair as well.[158] This declaration of fiction's primacy as a potential means of imparting and of obtaining not only pleasure and instruction but also greater humanity is a central theme of Brown's expressions of his literary theory,

method, and aims, all of which are inextricable from his rather particular conceptions of the true and of the ethical.

Defying the common understanding, Brown argues against the easy distinction between works of fact and those of fiction. Although he maintains, as in the preface to *Wieland*, a separation of the useful from the "frivolous" productions, he does not equate this distinction with that between works that appeal to the reason and to observable or recorded fact and works that use fictional elements to stimulate the emotions and the imagination (3). He rejects the conventional binary and substitutes a sliding scale with sober chronicles of observed action on one end and purely fantastical inventions on the other. And along with it, he rejects the opinion, common in that era, that fictionality was antithetical to the values of a rational republic. His ideal, as implicitly invoked in his historically-grounded novels and explicitly argued in his literary essays and reviews, is the middle ground. In a key essay, one that I have found useful in previous discussions yet is worthy of fuller analysis, he expressed the belief that "a narration of public events, with a certain license of invention, was the most efficacious of moral instruments" (35).

Appearing in the August and September 1799 issues of the *Monthly Magazine*, in the midst of Brown's brief but prodigiously prolific novel-writing phase, the two-part article entitled "Walstein's School of History, from the German of Krantz" is often cited as the most direct and comprehensive statement of Brown's own narrative aims and methods.[159] The essay is a strange blend of genres, at once a work of fiction (in the form of an overview of a fictional group of historiographers) and of literary and historiographical theory, and it brings together a number of ideas reiterated and sometimes expanded upon in other pieces. Perhaps stranger still, at least at first blush, is

the contention that objective truth is not only overrated, but also that it is rarely true, and that its possession (or the *belief* that one has possession of it) can anaesthetize the holder to what is truly important.

Krantz, Brown's fictional historian (of a group of fictional historians), begins with a description of an intellectual fellowship that approximates the relation of Brown and his Friendly Club mates to their own models, particularly to Godwin, or perhaps of Brown to his mentor Elihu Smith. A certain number of Walstein's admiring students began meeting as a group and exchanging and comparing ideas with each other and with their professor who "laying aside his professional dignity, conversed with them on the footing of a friend and equal." These students enthusiastically espoused the ideals of the master, although, again not unlike Brown's adaptation of Godwinian thought, "it could not but happen, [. . .] that the criterion of excellence would be somewhat modified in passing through the mind of each; that each should have his peculiar modes of writing and thinking" (31).

Historical narrative, Walstein believed, is a tool for increasing the general happiness of mankind through imparting moral understanding. His intention is to depict enlightened personages striving for the general happiness in ways best suited to their stations and the particular circumstances. Krantz offers a description of his two books, one on Cicero, the other on the Marquis of Pombal, both presented in the form of autobiography, a fictive conceit. Walstein's felt duty to historical truth does not arise from a devotion to objectivity per se but from a conviction that a compellingly realistic portrait of "human excellence" would facilitate the "happiness of mankind" by instilling in readers a zeal to imitate such "models of right conduct." The realism thus striven for

serves not the cause of truth but is a function of a desire to "illuminate the understanding, to charm curiosity, and sway the passions" toward a "love and zeal of virtue" (33). Engel, Walstein's eldest student, followed his instructor's lead, believing that "to exhibit in eloquent narration a model of right conduct is the highest province of benevolence" (35). He, however, recognized that most readers would not find themselves in the exalted positions of prominent men. A closer parallel between the common reader's state and that of the persons exhibited in the narrative seemed preferable. For this reason he turned from conventional history to novels, "fictitious history." In this Engel could portray the common man in his sphere of influence, particularly in the common but complex relations with others that fall under the categories of property (or economic and class considerations) and sex (or considerations of gender and sexuality). "The usefulness [of such fictitious history]," Engle believed, "undoubtedly, consists in suggesting a mode of reasoning and acting somewhat similar to that which is ascribed to a feigned person" (37). Brown's self-identification with this portrait of Engel is manifested in the summary of Engel's novel "Olivo Ronsica," which is actually a summary of Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* with character and place names changed.

Because of his interest in the richness of experience, Brown finds too much fictionalization, too much indulgence of imaginative license (or, to use Coleridge's distinction, "fancy") to be counterproductive to what he considers the proper aims of narrative. It is for this reason that Brown, a defender of novel-reading in general, took to task the run-of-the-mill sentimental and Gothic works for their potential to distort readers' sense of reality. He decries what he saw as the popular narratives' abuses, their infidelity to the realities of lived experience—not only the improbabilities of the events,

rationally considered, but also the unrealistic perceptions and emotional and imaginative responses of the characters. Most Gothic narratives, he argues, trading on the pleasure of passions evoked and imagination indulged, nevertheless implicitly devalue the feelings and imagination of both the characters and the readers:

> The multitude of Mrs. Radcliffe's imitators seem to have thought that description and sentiment were impertinent intruders, and by lowering the mind somewhat to its ordinary state, marred and counteracted those awful feelings, which true genius was properly employed in raising. They endeavor to keep the reader in a constant state of tumult and horror, by the powerful engines of trap-doors, back stairs, black robes, and pale faces: but the solution to the enigma is ever too close at hand, to permit the indulgence of supernatural appearances. A well-written scene of a party at snap-dragon would exceed all the fearful images of these books. ("Terrific Novels" *Literary Essays* 143-4).

The objective of the story-telling moralist, then, is to move the mind out of its "ordinary state." He appreciated the beauties of a well-written narrative and argued that reading merely on the principle of pleasure, although it makes the reader no wiser, is no bad thing. However, he deplores the popular novel when it instills "estimates of human life and happiness that are calculated upon false foundations" ("On the Causes of the Popularity of Novels" *Literary Essays* 181). An early short story published in May 1798 entitled "A Lesson on Sensibility" centers on the hapless, insane Archibald who "has remained for some years, an example of the fatal effects of addicting the undisciplined mind to books, in which Nature is so fantastically and egregiously belied"

(*Somnambulism* 105). Fully aware of the revolutionary power of story-telling, Brown uses story-telling to warn of the failures and abuses of story-telling, as well.

He finds ostensibly true narratives, that is, biographies and histories, equally capable of distorting our picture of reality and equally culpable for desensitizing readers to what he might have called, after the title of one of his short stories, the romance of real life. "No writers more than the historian, and the professed romancer," he argues, "so sedulously practice the artifice of awakening curiosity, and feasting that appetency of the mind, which turns from simple truth to spirited fiction" ("Historical Characters" 162). Novels and histories alike are pernicious, he insists, when they make readers less attentive to the subtleties and the varieties of experience, when they lull readers into merely indulging the pleasure that comes from the satisfaction of their increasingly unrealistic expectations, when they make readers averse to or insensible of the elements of common life that make a call upon our attention and responsiveness. He stresses the need to have empathy for "the obscure living" and to not devalue and ignore the merits of real people in favor of false representations of nature presented in exaggerated historical portraits of "the illustrious dead" (164). In the article "Anecdotes," Brown endorses the idea that historical narrative should be valued for its insights into the human condition, life as it experienced, those extra-schematic particularities of real life experience. The useful history will portray "common life" which the historian must "regard [. . .] with minute attention, and reflect long on a thousand little strokes, which are to give the faithful resemblance" (160). It is there we find "the causes of the misery and prosperity of our country," and there where we must turn for a picture of the "progress of the human mind." Using a figure of familial interest, he insists, "We should consult the annals of

history as a son and a brother would turn over his domestic memoirs" (159). Brown's message is that we ought to take the curiosity that we exercise in our reading about kings and empires into our encounters with real life persons.

We see this concern expressed in his literary reviews. Regarding content, he advocated attention to specifics of character and circumstance rather than reliance on types. In the review article "Sketches of Some Recent Novels," he credits the author of *What You Please* for an ability to display the characters' "peculiar turns of temper" and for showing himself, "in many instances, a good observer of the springs and motives which influence the conduct of individuals in the commerce of life." Later in the same article, Brown faults another author for having "no felicity in developing and unfolding the peculiar distinctions and shades of character" and giving the reader no opportunity "of forming what is equivalent to a personal acquaintance with the character recorded." "This defect," he insists, "must necessarily render all biography, whether real or fictitious, less interesting in proportion to its extent; and in avoiding this fault, consist the great art and secret of fascinating and riveting the mind of the reader; as Fielding and Smollet, and other eminent writers in this walk, have so happily illustrated in their writings" (*Literary Essays* 157). The emphasis in Brown's writings on the truth of human nature is the recognition of the ethical need to make present the other human being in his or her "genuine and peculiar" state, not as covered over by preconceptions or idealizations or "decorations of [the historian's] fancy," but as presented in the "nudity of truth" ("Historical Characters" 163). If too enthralled by the historian's or romancer's inventive arts, "we form false estimates of the human character, and, while we exhaust

our sensations in artificial sympathies, amidst calamities of life, we suppress those warmer emotions we otherwise should indulge" (161).

But in Brown's usage this truth is a qualified truth, the truth as it appears to us from our historical-cultural point of view, and not as it may be in some absolute and objective state. Truth and nature, as Brown goes out of his way to note, are indeed only "our *own* conceptions of truth and nature." And he offers no end point of inquiry, no eschatology of human understanding, only the notion of truths being inextricable with particular times and places: "We naturally conceive our own habits and opinions the standard of rectitude; but their rectitude, admitting our claim to be just, will not hinder them from giving way to others, and being exploded in their turn" ("Romances" *Literary Essays* 142). The explanatory and mimetic functionality of fictitious histories, Brown takes pains to point out, is not to be judged by timeless, objective standards but is relative to the subjective, context-bound nature of changing conceptions of taste, truth, and nature. Elsewhere he argues, "In matters of *taste* and *criticism,* as well as of *morality* and *history,* we have not yet discovered any mode by which the truth of our opinions could be *demonstrated.*"[160]

Similarly, Brown's fictional historian Walstein "was conscious of the uncertainty of history":

> Actions and motives cannot be truly described. We can only make approaches to the truth. The more attentively we observe mankind, and study ourselves, the greater will this uncertainty appear, and the farther shall we find ourselves from truth.

> This uncertainty, however, has some bounds. Some circumstances of events, and some events, are more capable of evidence than others. The same may be said of motives. Our guesses as to the motives of some actions are more probable than the guesses that relate to other actions. Though no one can state the motives from which any action has flowed, he may enumerate motives from which it is quite certain, that the action did not flow. (*Literary Essays* 33)

The historian's (and moral story-teller's) duty is to the continuous approach to the greatest probability. Thus, "the impossibility of absolute certainty," the principle Brown would find in his reading of Condorcet's philosophy, is the stimulus to more not less attention; a need to always reassess the balance of probabilities.[161] He expands upon this idea of the probabilistic not apodictic nature of all knowledge in yet another important essay.

In "The Difference between History and Romance" (April 1800), more explicitly than in "Walstein's School," Brown argues that the common distinction fails to hold up to scrutiny. James Dillon sees Brown using rhetorical sleight of hand to claim for fiction what is conventionally identified with history.[162] But Brown's distinctions are perhaps best understood as faculties or operations of the mind: thus, one is a historian when reacting merely to sensory perception, observing actions directly or through the medium of another's account; and one is a romancer when speculating about causes and tendencies, when drawing connections and comparisons. Brown conceptually links even the writings of scientists to those of historians and romancers (his term for fiction writers) and all of them to considerations of certainty and probability:

> Narratives, whether fictitious or true, may relate to the processes of nature, or the actions of men. [. . .] The observer or experimentalist, therefore, who carefully watches, and faithfully enumerates the appearances which occur, may claim the appellation of historian. He who adorns these appearances with cause and effect, and traces resemblances between the past, distant, and future, with the present, performs a different part. He is a dealer, not in certainties, but probabilities, and is therefore a romancer. (*Literary Essays* 83)

He names Buffon, Linnaeus, and Herschel as examples of scientists who are both "diligent" recorders (historians) and "adventurous" theorists (romancers). "Among the historians of nature, Haller was, perhaps, the most diligent: among romancers, he that came nearest to the truth was Newton" (84). In his focus on the imaginative speculation involved in attributions of cause and of resemblance (as opposed to logical demonstration), one is reminded of Hume's skepticism, which challenges even the certainty that the sun will rise in the east tomorrow. To Brown such an assertion is one of probability and not certainty. And like Hume he argues that causal relations between actions even if observed are merely conjectural: "Two contemporary and (so to speak) adjacent actions may both be faithfully described, because both may be witnessed; but the connection between them, that quality which constitutes one the effect of the other, is mere matter of conjecture, and comes within the province, not of *history*, but *romance*" (84). He cautions against the habit of the mind to accept as true and self-evident, as unquestionably natural and a matter of common sense, those appearances that are historically contingent and subject to the perceptions and testimonies of others:

> The facts to which we are immediate witnesses, are, indeed, numerous; but time and place merely connect them. Useful narratives must comprise facts linked together by some other circumstance. They must, commonly, consist of events, for a knowledge of which the narrator is indebted to the evidence of others. This evidence, though accompanied with different degrees of probability, can never give birth to certainty. How wide, then, if romance be the narrative of mere probabilities, is the empire of romance? This empire is absolute and undivided over the motives and tendencies of human actions. Over actions themselves, its dominion, though not unlimited, is yet very extensive. (85)

His remarks on the on-going controversies regarding yellow fever further exhibit his skeptical views on the inevitable progress of reason toward absolute certainty: "How is the pride of human reason humbled, by observing that in this enlightened age, with so vigilant a police, with such comprehensive and exact methods of investigating facts, and such diffusing vehicles of information and comparison as newspapers afford, there should still be in the community opposite opinions as to the nature and origin of a pestilence which has visited our principal cities five times in ten years?" ("Yellow Fever" 7-8).

"The Proper End of Reading"

Elihu Smith, like the British radical democrats, conceived of popular narratives—of novels (like Godwin's *Caleb Williams*), plays (Smith and Brown's planned but unfinished adaptation of Bage's *Hermsprong*), opera libretti (Smith's *Edwin and Angelina*), and narrative or expository poems (like Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* for which Smith composed a poetic preface describing the rise of print and its use to spread

knowledge)—as effective means of communicating to the non-cognoscenti the truth of the world as disclosed by the disinterested exercise of observation and reason.[163] And more than merely passing along information and exhibiting ideas, such works were intended to convert hearts and minds to what Smith refers to in a letter to Brown as "our philosophy." The foundation of this Godwinian philosophy, as Philp observes, is the discoverability, communicability, and progressive character of an eternal truth. Brown challenges this foundation on all counts. In his literary practice, Brown moves beyond this model and develops an idea of the importance for moral being of uncertainty. The principle of the impossibility of absolute certainty is not for Brown merely a negative critique. His inconclusive, incongruent, and contradictory narratives suggest the ethical lies not in the truth sought, but in the interaction of persons in the immediacy of the moment. The office of the story-telling moralist is less about communicating the truth and more about engaging the unknown. It is an insight likely fostered in the intimacy as much if not more than in the intellectualism of the Friendly Club circle.

The philosophical outlook culminating for Brown in Godwin's works and in Smith's counsels locates the source of true knowledge and moral authority within the individual's capacity to reason toward an eternal truth. It is dependent upon the idea of the communicability of truth and of its necessary progress. The philosophy is succinctly summed up in Godwin's short, sharp propositions: "Sound reasoning and truth, when adequately communicated, must always be victorious over error: Sound reasoning and truth are capable of being so communicated: Truth is omnipotent: The vices and moral weakness of man are not invincible: Man is perfectible, or in other words susceptible of perpetual improvement" (*Political Justice*, second edition, I: 86-87). In this view, the

laws of the material universe, of its constitution and operations, consist in the principle of the self-sufficient operation of mechanical necessity. The mind too is material and mechanical. As Philp explains, in Godwin's thought, as informed by the writings of Joseph Priestly and David Hartley as well as of d'Holbach and Helvetius, "the association of ideas is also a matter of necessity, and that, as we gain clear and distinct ideas and combine these in propositions, we are moved by those ideas to act" (Philp xvi). Thus, in contrast to Plato, Godwin saw the operation of conflicting points of view as working toward greater truth and consensus.

Understood as a machine, the world of man, like the world of all nature, proceeds in a logical and discoverable manner to a single and uniform truth. From the principle of necessity comes the happy consequence that close observation and judicious reasoning render future events predictable and past events deducible from present evidence. The doctrine of material Necessitarianism also opens the possibility of enlightened social engineering. Helvetius saw no constraints on it, since pleasure and pain guide judgment and action and our ideas of right and wrong are culturally and historically contingent. Godwin held a goal-oriented conception of reason and dialogue and acknowledged that popular consensus is not the same as objectivity: "Private judgment and public deliberation are not themselves the standard of moral right and wrong; they are only the means of discovering right and wrong, and of comparing particular propositions with the standard of eternal truth" (*Political Justice* 94). In this view, the other rational human being, in a way not unlike the Quaker friend, serves as a vehicle of mutual progress toward a common goal, the rational truth. And thus in moving away from the religionists' centering concept of God, the divine Logos, the Godwinian philosophy

nevertheless retains a conception of a secularized impersonal logos. Brown's Ormond and Martinette reflect different manifestations of this view. Martinette sacrifices friends and would willingly sacrifice her own life on the altar of the rights of man about which Paine writes so forcefully. Ormond, with his Godwinian conception of necessity and his network of secret coadjutors, schemes to bring about a more perfect society, to socially engineer a utopian civilization somewhere in uncharted wilds.

What seems to have remained with Brown as he worked through these ideas is that Quakers and Godwin, building on his own dissenting background, did move toward a greater personal responsibility and ethical responsiveness. Quakerism conceives of a stronger moral bond with the other human being. More than as merely another soul on a journey to the afterlife, the other human being in the Quaker view of things is as a crucial aid and a responsibility, as a Friend; because everyone is a receptacle of the divine light and potential channel of the eternal truth, the self and the other are mutual aids to one another's spiritual journey. The intersubjective relation is still, however, part of a religious framework and, therefore, is a relation mediated by the mutual prior relation with the divine.

Godwin, Philp argues, sought to "encourage people to think for themselves and to take responsibility for their lives, their actions, and their relations with their fellows; that is, to think for themselves and ask themselves: What ought I to do? And, in weighing my own claims in comparison to others at such and such a value, am I assessing them justly" (xxxiii-xxxiv). Indeed, Godwin's claims for first-order impartiality, a strict rational disinterestedness that impels one to do everything one can for the greater good, to sacrifice one's personal desires to the needs of the general happiness, places a rather

extreme burden on the individual. Consider Godwin's famous thought experiment: You can only save one of the two people trapped in a house fire, either a lowly maid or Fénelon, the celebrated early eighteenth-century French philosopher, before he has written his influential *Telemachus*. Reason dictates that in order to serve the greater good for the greater number, a rational view of morality, you must save Fénelon. What if the maid were your own mother? Godwin insists that you must still choose Fénelon. Sentimentality corrupts moral vision.[164]

Brown sought this ideal of extreme personal responsibility but challenged Godwin's means, that is, his investment in the efficacy of reason, his deference to a rational calculation of utility; but moreover Brown challenged the foundation of Godwin's program and did so along the same lines of his critique of Christianity, of the evangelical strand of Quakerism adopted by his friend Bringhurst: he challenged the idea of the discoverability of an eternal truth. In the portraits of Theodore Wieland and Ormond, he explodes the idea of accessing this space outside the ego, a space from which the ego can receive or make assessments of the justice of one's claims and those of others. Brown's conception of impartiality is even more radical, suggesting as it does that deference to a logos is in fact merely a means of assimilating alterity rather than taking direct responsive action. The logos all too easily becomes merely a projection of the ego.

When his novelistic phase burst from him, Brown, unlike Godwin, did not start from a moral system or a preconceived ending. At least with his early works, Brown's composition "did not proceed in [a] systematic manner," Dunlap explains. "He began to write a novel after having only determined upon one leading circumstance, character or

idea, and trusted to the growth of one incident to another, and the appropriate sentiments from the incidents. One volume would be finished and printed before he had formed any plan for the beginning of the second, or any plan for the continuation, development or denouement of the story" (*Life* I.258). But the critic Warner Berthoff offers some compelling insights into this process, pointing to "a potential element of order in this episodic method, not that of the well-made plot or of meticulously developed characterization, but of thematic repetition, of successive and cumulative analogy." "Brown's novels," he argues, "proceed through a chain of incidents which, though disconnected, restate and sometimes deepen, each one, the common theme" (47). And perhaps it is this approach of following not literary formula or the outlines of a philosophical demonstration but his own associative imaginings for as long as he could plausibly affirm their verisimilitude that accounts for the appearance of fragmentariness. But we might also consider how this method, the exploration of embodied humans' interactions with circumstances as well as ideas, may function to make a nearer approach not to an eternal truth but to the psychological and moral truth of his characters and situations. Whatever they may suggest about the very existence of eternal truth, the novels, from their first-person narration to their contested and inconclusive issues of fact and of meaning, focus not on the metaphysical but on the realm of human psychology and human interactions. The ethical, then, appears not in referring to this realm outside the individual, but in responsiveness to the unknown; it appears not in understanding or even in striving to understand or confirm an eternal and universal truth but in an unflagging attention to the otherness of the other human being, a recognition of his or her always being in a state of becoming.

Brown objects to Godwin's first-order impartiality not on the grounds of it imposing too great a demand on the individual. Instead, in Brown's novels the disasters that arise from the claims of transcendent moral knowledge, claims of an impartial point-of-view, illustrate the impossibility of attaining this state of omniscience necessary for a truly moral impartiality or, at the very least, of ever knowing one has achieved it. If, as I have argued, Brown critiques the evasion of responsibility by means of hiding behind contracts, behind "abstract justice and political utility," then especially in Constantia's response to her killing of Ormond, Brown seems to suggest that the truly ethical lies in taking an extreme responsibility beyond the letter of the law, beyond clear conscience and beyond any other cessation in one's benevolent attentions.

A good story-teller can, in Brown's view, coax just such ethical vigilance from his readers. By virtue of its detail of actions, an artful narrative captures the attention of the reader; through its description of character and motives, narrative inspires identification with the characters and "the spirit of salutary emulation." As he observed in "Walstein's" and in several literary reviews, the intended promotion of good morals, however admirable in itself, cannot hope to be realized if the reader cannot recognize in characters a truth of common experience, at least at the broad level of human nature. Thus, in his fictional biographies, Brown provides a great deal of psychological detail—family background, early formative experiences, education, and worldviews, as expressed and acted upon in various contexts, as well as, occasionally, something like an early form of stream-of-consciousness narration—, affording the reader a view of the characters at close quarters and extended over time. From this perspective, the horrific or confounding actions the characters take evince less a species of innate perversity than a

complicated and twisted drive toward some misguided, misbegotten understanding of the good. On the level of conscious intent, at least, the major characters' unethical actions are driven by sincerely-held ethical convictions. Regarding her brother and his "lofty crimes," Clara, as a proxy for the reader, cannot help but admire the strength of conviction, the dedication to moral duty no matter the personal cost. Similarly, Ormond's interaction with Constantia, as Krause observes, makes him a strangely compelling and attractive figure before (and to some degree despite) his most extreme behavior.[165] We feel at least a degree of compassion for these men, "men unknown to themselves," to borrow Brown's subtitle for his lost novel, as they leave the state of becoming for a false, fixed transcendent being. And in Constantia's compassion for such a being even in the face of trauma we see a model of right conduct.

But as argued in "Walstein's School," this model's particular actions are of less import than her "modes of reasoning and action." Of what do these modes of right reason and conduct consist? They seem to consist of the same attributes enacted by the benevolent author. A priority is attention to the details of the character and the circumstance. The knowledge of the emotions and the imagination as well as cognition should inform a judgment and action that is not just mechanical imitation of what others have thought or done, for Cicero and Pombal would have acted in a way opposite to their famous interventions, adopting the strategy of the other had they switched circumstances, doing what was best in that particular situation; nor is it the Clarissa-like slavish devotion to antecedent rules such as the general rules of filial duty. Thus informed by our imaginations as well as our thoughts, we may form the best notions of the most beneficent action toward those within our sphere of influence. As such the model offered

may not always be any one character in the novel, but a way of engaging the other as other and not simply as an iteration of an established concept. Moral understanding and being, in a manner analogous to the art of the story-telling moralist as Brown seems to conceive of it, emerges from continuous attention to and thoughtful, imaginative engagement with others; not through intuition (moral sense), nor the careful preservation of innate goodness; not through disciplined study of precepts, the disinterested calculation of the greatest good for the greatest number, nor through direct revelation.

And reading, too, like writing, is an art, Brown asserts. In "Remarks on Reading" he contrasts two kinds of reader, arguing that one will "rise from the perusal of the same book [having] only delighted himself with the brilliant colouring, and the mingled shadows of a variety of objects, while the other receives the impression not only of their colours and shades, but their distinct graces and real forms" (166). Brown explains, "The one will not only have the ideas of the author at command, and strongly imbibe his manner, but will have enriched his own mind by a new accession of matter, and find a new train of thought *awakened* and *in action*" (166, my italics). The wakefulness and activity is here privileged over mere mastery of ideas and imbibing of a writer's manner. In distinguishing the "the proper end of reading," Brown is not inculcating tenets but calling for a thoughtful response, a committed engagement, an acknowledgement of objects in their "distinct graces and real forms," language suggestive of unmediated response to the unique not the type.

And Brown's concern for ethical reading or conscientious reading as an ethical praxis is not the product of mere abstract philosophizing but emerges in the context of pressing practical issues. In the absence of other grounds of common identity, like

religion, ethnicity, or common history, the newly independent colonies and young republic clung to a shared set of principles codified in constitutive documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights—and expressed in and shaped by commonly shared narratives, historical and fictional. The relation of the individual or small community to the larger, less-tangible union of the several, far-ranging states necessitated the exchange of symbols, whether rhetorical tropes, stories, or images, as a means of creating and sustaining that sense of common identity. Americans identified themselves as such not through symbols alone but also through reading practices. That is, we can think of conscientious American citizenship being enacted in the refinement of symbol decoding, in the action of a rational, self-possessed, and sensitive mind capable of discerning and embracing public virtue, or put another way, a mind susceptible to a contagious republicanism. Whether that kind of mind is one that the individual best discovers and cultivates on his own free from the distortions of government, church, or social authorities or is one that must be induced by a judicious manipulation of the social environment by enlightened and benevolent minds, a political elite of disinterested men, seems to be a major distinguishing line between Jeffersonian republicans (agrarians, individualists, democrats) and Federalists (landed gentry, business, or professional men, civic humanists, quasi-aristocrats).

The ethics as conceived here—the response of thoughtful attention, inclusive of reason, of feelings, and imagination; beyond preconceived categories—demands, that is, it can only be expressed in, a narrative form that complements the ethical relation (one between the self and the truly other, that is, the other human being not divested of his or her otherness) and enacts the rational self's relation to the imperfect embodied self. In

other words, the narrative's form must be such that it prompts readers to become active in interpreting and judging, of fully engaging the characters and circumstances as if they were really present. Thus, we might take it that embodied in the Brown novel's uncouth narrative form, a form at once familiar and alienating, is a philosophical and, most fundamentally, a moral argument. That argument is that good being is a function of good reading.

Consider that Brown's neo-classical use of the term grotesque—as in "Goldsmith and Johnson": "Johnson's attempts at pourtraying life and manners, as they existed around him, were remarkably unfortunate. His eastern tales have all the merit compatible with plans so wild, grotesque, and unnatural" (*Literary Essays* 147)—conveys something like the opposite of the more modern idea that associates the term with the Real or the IT (as discussed in Wolfgang Kayser's work on the grotesque), an inescapable if ineffable ground of reality. In Brown's usage of the term, the grotesque is the product of mental operations not fully engaging with the reality of lived experience; grotesques are only in the mind, as in his phrase "chimeras of the brain" (*Wieland* 65). But, as expressed in his novels and literary essays, Brown aims for an authentic experience, one that presents the mystery of the other mind. As such, Brown's pejorative use of the term reveals his desire to get to the truth of experience stripped of the efforts to cover over its natural state of uncertainty. We might compare this with Derrida's use of the term *purity* to indicate an originary state of paradoxical blendedness prior to the imposition of discriminating terminology. That is, the purest state, as Derrida argues, is the original state of impurity—or what through our taxonomically-inclined perceptual apparatus appears as impurity. Similarly, Brown's apparent disgust with "grotesque" conceptions or

deceptions (as in Ormond's "grotesque" metamorphosis) is his response to the disregarding or defacing of that experience that should make a claim on our attention and our capacity for ethical response.

The value of narratives, whether fictional or historical, Brown insists, lies in its effects in the realm of practical reasoning, in the realm of the ethical; it "lies without doubt in their moral tendency," as he puts it in his self-introductory advertisement for his now lost first novel ("Notice" 202). But Brown's narratives go beyond inculcating a moral system; indeed, they function to challenge the ethics of ethics, to subject ideas to reality-grounded counterfactual scenarios, to expose the humanity and justice or lack thereof of moral systems. The interpretative and moral failings of the characters arise not as a result of a failure to privilege benevolence, self-control, and reason over the urgings of passion and the delusions of imagination, but as a result of the dogged attempt to do so. The approach to life that relies predominantly upon antecedent rules and classificatory schemes aims to make one impervious to surprise. Consider Wieland's inability to accept evidence that the voice he heard was a delusion and Ormond's assertion that his prediction of Clara's future "knows not the empire of contingency" (258). New circumstances and phenomena are assimilated into the preconceived system of thought with a disregard for and even at times hostility toward any particularities that resist assimilation. If the recalcitrant particularities are strong enough, they will appear to the consciousness already interpreted and evaluated as prodigies, anomalies, and monsters. Surprise, as C. M. Wieland attests is one element of the effect of the grotesque, an often painful emotion that we too readily counteract with reductive rationality or rejection. In contrast to this approach, however, is an openness to the

newness of experience in its particularities that defies antecedent judgments. It is the approach that is "susceptible to adventure" and "susceptible of influence" (Nussbaum 180). It sees and responds to the grotesque entity as it is in its concreteness, not as, abstractly considered, a clash of categories. It is the approach, informed and curious, open and active, that Brown posits as the proper aim of reading, of both literature and life, an approach richly and ethically responsive and responsible.

Notes

[1] Throughout this dissertation all citations to Brown's novels will refer to The Kent State Bicentennial Edition of *The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown* published in six volumes between 1977 and 1987 under the general editorship of Sydney J. Krause and S. W. Reid. All citations to Brown's correspondence will refer to *The Collected Writings of Charles Brockden Brown: Letters and Early Epistolary Writings* (2013), the first volume in a projected seven-volume collection under the general editorship of Mark L. Kamrath. My citations of Brown's magazine pieces will reference, where applicable, the only scholarly print collection currently available: *Charles Brockden Brown: Literary Essays and Reviews* (1992) edited by Alfred Weber and Wolfgang Shafer with John Holmes. Magazine pieces I cite that are not included in this collection will reference original publication information; but these pieces, along with his letters, can also be found in the scholarly, searchable on-line archive *The Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive and Scholarly Edition*, part of the same project that is also producing *The Collected Writings* in print.

[2]For my discussion of Caritat, his circulating library, his bookselling, and his publishing ventures I have drawn from George Gates Raddin's *Hocquet Caritat and the Early New York Literary Scene* (1953) and *The New York of Hocquet Caritat and his Associates 1797-1817* (1953); Dorothy Blakey's *Minerva Press, 1790-1820* (1939); John Davis' *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America; During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (1803); and Caritat's own "explanatory catalogue" *The Feast of Reason and the Flow of the Soul* (1799).

[3]In an essay arguing for the important influence of the French *philosophes* on Brown's work, Wil Verhoeven emphasizes Caritat's role as "a Maecenas of the arts and ambassador for the French Enlightenment," "a sponsor of serious and radical literature, in defiance of the spirit of conservatism that had begun to dominate the public sphere in America at the time" ("This Blissful Period" 21, 37 n.55). But, drawing on Raddin's studies of the bookman, Verhoeven also notes Caritat's great commercial success and his "remarkable" ability to maintain "a prominent position and good relations with the Americans in the period 1797 to 1804, when French American relations were very tense, and the French living in America were subject to suspicion and discrimination." "What is even more remarkable," he adds, "is that all through this period, Caritat was on a good footing with prominent figures on *both* sides of the deepening rift in the American political scene, from Thomas Paine and John Fellows on the democratic side, to Alexander Hamilton and Rufus King on the Federalist side" (21). These facts, along with the decidedly populist, commercial bent portrayed in John Davis's account, suggest that Caritat was pragmatic about accomplishing his idealistic goals. But trafficking in trifling amusements and even works of counterrevolutionary sentiment were not only a matter of good business and good politics; it was also consistent with his dedication to the free exchange of ideas. As such, Verhoeven's point still stands: if not before then certainly after Caritat opened his doors, Brown had access to and became familiar with the work of the French *philosophes*. But it may well be added that in Caritat's enterprise we see can see a common cause with Brown's literary project: the advocacy of dialogue itself.

[4] The delightfully "horrid" novels Isabella Thorpe lists for Catherine Morland are Eliza Parson's *Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) and *Mysterious Warnings* (1796), Regina Maria Roche's *Clermont* (1798), Lawrence Flammenberg's [pseudonym of Karl Friedrich Kahlert] *The Necromancer; or, The Tale of the Black Forest* (1794), Francis Lathom's *Midnight Bell* (1798), Eleanor Sleath's *Orphan of the Rhine* (1798), and Carl Grosse's *Horrid Mysteries* (1796). It was long thought that Austen simply made up these titles. Montague Summers, however, in 1938 confirmed their independent existence outside Austen's imagination; see *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel*. The Minerva Press published all but the Lathom novel. See the lengthy list of the press's (mostly Gothic) publications in Dorothy Blakey's *Minerva Press, 1790-1820* (1939).

[5] See the footnote to this passage in A. J. Morrison's 1909 edition of Davis's *Travels* for full titles and some publication information. Morrison lists the anonymous *Female Frailty; or, The History of Miss Wroughtan*

(1772) and *The Posthumous Daughter* (1797). He notes that a *Cavern of Death* was published in London in 1794 and in Baltimore in 1795; but Davis may in fact be referring to a volume entitled *Sight, A Cavern of Woe, and Solitude*, a collection of poems by Mary Robinson published in London in 1793. The other titles Davis lists refer to Elizabeth Helme's sentimental novel *Louisa; or, The Cottage-on-the-Moor* (1787), George Walker's *The House of Tynian* (1795), Ann Radcliffe's *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), Jacques Cazotte's *The Devil in Love* (1772), the anonymous *More Ghosts* (1798), and the early penny dreadful by Christian Augustus Volpius *Rinaldo Rinaldini, The Robber Captain* (1797).

[6] In late 1797, he began the manuscript of a novel he called *Sky-Walk; or, The Man Unknown to Himself*, which would later be lost with the death of its would-be publisher. An advertisement for the forth-coming work appeared in the *Weekly Magazine* (March 1798) and an excerpt soon after. Elements of *Sky-Walk*, particularly the device of sleep-walking, were repurposed for *Edgar Huntly* (1799).

[7] Paul Allen began what would become the first biography of Brown soon after the author's death. Dunlap completed the project and published it as *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown: together with a selection of the rarest of his printed works, from his original letters, and from his manuscripts before unpublished* (1815). Other biographical works include William H. Prescott's entry on Brown in *Library of American Biography, vol. 1* (1834) and the anonymous introduction to the 1827 edition of the complete novels. His twentieth century biographers include Harry Warfel, David Lee Clark, Steven Watts, and Peter Kafer. The diaries of Brown's close friends Elihu Smith, William Dunlap, and Thomas Pym Cope are also useful sources of information on Brown's life and opinions. In addition, vivid descriptions and telling anecdotes about Brown appear in the previously mentioned travelogue of John Davis and in the memoir of actor John Bernard entitled *Retrospections of America, 1797-1811* (1887). Finally, the definitive, scholarly edition of Brown's letters, the first volume in a series that will comprise all extant non-novelistic works, appeared in print in 2013. The Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive is the searchable, on-line collection of these works.

[8] Of the approximately twenty or so American novels published before September 1798, most are novels of sentiment, like William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Susannah Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794), and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), which are concerned with the trials and tribulations of romantic and domestic relations. (See Lyle Wright's *American Fiction, 1774-1850: A Contribution toward a Bibliography*, 2nd edition [1969], page 363, for a chronology of American fiction. Henri Petter's *The Early American Novel* [1971] offers synopses of these works.) Such concerns are not without parallels in the romantic subplots of Brown's novels, but English novelist Samuel Richardson is the likely model for Brown in this area. Bryan Waterman notes that there is no indication that Brown or his circle read Rowson or Foster or any other popular American women writers ("Introduction: Reading Early America with Charles Brockden Brown" 238). Several other American productions before Brown's are picaresque novels, including *Modern Chivalry* (1792-7) by Hugh Henry Brackenridge, the anonymously written *The History of Constantius and Pulchera* (1796), and *The Algerine Captive* (1797) by Royall Tyler. Like *Wieland*, these works are self-consciously topical, but unlike Brown's novel they aim in large measure for satire.

[9] See Barnard and Shapiro's extensively annotated edition of *Wieland* for details on the sources Brown references, pages 3, 19, and 198.

[10] In the "Preface to the Second Edition," Walpole explains the work as "an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern" (7). By creating characters that "think, speak and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions," Walpole allowed readers to identify with and live vicariously through the heroes and heroines as they experienced feelings of terror and pity (8).

[11] Influential works on the Gothic by David Punter, Edith Birkhead, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have informed my discussion here.

[12] The term Gothic itself served to conflate the barbarous Goths, a Germanic tribe of the early Middle Ages that wreaked havoc on the declining Roman empire, with the scholarly monks of the Late Middle Ages to

designate a cruel, superstitious culture mortally and morally opposed to the increasingly revered civilizations of classical Greece and Rome and to the biblical Christianity idealized by Protestants. *Otranto*, *Udolpho*, *The Monk*, and many other early Gothic narratives are set during the centuries before the Renaissance; located for the most part in the Catholic regions of southern Europe, particularly Italy and Spain; and peopled with lascivious monks, sadistic abbesses, superstitious Roman Catholic devotees, cutthroat banditti, plotting usurpers, and perverse and oppressive parents. Gothic literature, Baldick argues, "usually shows no [. . .] respect for the wisdom of the past, and indeed tends to portray former ages as prisons of delusion" (xv).

[13] Gary Kelly coined the term *Jacobin novel*. As he explains in his book *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (1976), he derives the term from *The Anti-Jacobin; or Weekly Examiner*, the periodical of the radical democrats' political opponents. The major English Jacobin novels include Robert Bage's *Man As He Is* (1792) and *Hermsprong; or, Man As He Is Not* (1796), Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* (1792), Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791) and *Nature and Art* (1796), and Charlotte Turner Smith's *Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle* (1788), *Desmond* (1792), and *The Old Manor House* (1793). At one time Brown and his friend Elihu Hubbard Smith planned to write a stage version of Bage's *Hermsprong*. See Smith's diary page 244.

[14] This group of writers set themselves against what they saw as the tyranny of feudalistic aristocracy with its outdated codes held over from the Middle Ages. Wollstonecraft presented arguments for the essentially equality of the sexes and the need for female education. Godwin advocated the belief in man's perfectibility through the exercise of private judgment informed by rational discourse. In his view, the free, sincere, and intimate exchange of ideas and feelings would lead to the eventual dismantling of government institutions like the state, the social hierarchy (peerage), and the church, which he argued claimed an illegitimate authority and maintained power through priestly obfuscations, rhetorical manipulations, and the inculcation of irrational and barbaric value systems, such as the code of honor most dramatically enacted through the still-extant practice of duelling.

[15] See M. O. Grenby's *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (2001) and Bryan Waterman's *Republic of Intellect.* Anti-Jacobin novelists include George Walker, Elizabeth Hamilton, Robert Bisset, Henry James Pye, Charles Lloyd, Jane West, and Edward Dubois.

[16] See the Barnard and Shapiro edition of *Wieland*, 321.

[17] Between her first meeting with the fascinating stranger Carwin and her first encounter with the mysterious voices, Clara spends a stormy day and contemplative evening in reveries about death, which she attempts to dispel with music. Barnard and Shapiro offer detailed information on the ballad that likely served as Brown's model for the ballad Clara lights upon, a work which she attributes to her father (49 and 309-16).

[18] See Elihu Hubbard Smith's diary for mentions of Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (serialized from 1786-89) and Tschink's *The Victim of Magical Delusion* (serialized 1790-93). Barnard and Shapiro offer excerpts from these novels, *Wieland* 319-25. Dunlap's diary, in which he notes Brown's work on different projects, evinces the near-simultaneous composition of the first four novels. Scholar Ed White argues that aspects of Carwin's character and background may have another source. He links Carwin to the politically unstable backcountry farm communities of Western Pennsylvania (site of the Paxton Riots) in arguing that Brown's novel exposes the tensions among socio-economic strata in a supposedly classless America. See his article "Carwin the Peasant Rebel" in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*.

[19] Anthony Galluzzo cites the works of Edmund Burke (as well as another major aesthetic theorist of the time, Immanuel Kant) as he investigates the "interpenetration" of eighteenth century aesthetics and politics.

[20] The paranoiac tracts of Augustin Barruel (*Memoirs; Illustrating the History of Jacobism* [1797]) and John Robison (*Proofs of a Conspiracy* [1798]) exacerbated fears of French hostilities and inspired Americans, like Jedidiah Morse and Timothy Dwight, to take up the call against foreign and home-grown subversives, which they linked to Jefferson and his party. See Barnard and Shapiro's appendix on the

Illuminati debates, which includes historical background and a detailed head-note to their excerpts of Dwight's reactionary pamphlet and of John Ogden's rebuttal. In *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville* (1989), Robert S. Levine provides an informative account of the conditions that gave rise to the fear-mongering narratives of subversive conspiracies targeting a vulnerable Europe and America, 17-24. See also Charles C. Bradshaw "The New England Illuminati: Conspiracy and Causality in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*".

[21] Smith and Dunlap were reading Morse and Robison during the same period they were helping Brown by reading proofs of *Wieland*. See Smith's and Dunlap's diaries (454 and 322 respectively). Carwin's link to Ireland may serve to associate him with recent uprisings there, which alarmists had attributed to Illuminati machinations. Additionally, hints of his being "engaged in schemes, reasonably suspected to be, in the highest degree criminal, but such as no human intelligence is able to unravel" may suggest to some his participation in an Illuminati-like secret society (*Wieland* 130). Brown explicitly develops just such a connection in the unfinished prequel to *Wieland* "Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist." Indeed, critics have read *Wieland* as a Federalist nightmare (Tompkins) and as a conservative warning against "aliens and infidels" (Samuels).

[22] Edwin Fussell ("Wieland: A Literary and Historical Reading"), offering a New Historicist perspective, writes, "Fortunate as we are to have so revealing a document as *Wieland*, it seems the rankest folly to read it mainly as a Gothic novel or other divertissement in the annals of literary types" (185). While Fussell expresses contempt for Gothic "divertissement[s]," Goddu, who also reads the novel for its revelations about the formation of early American identity, sees the Gothic element as central to Brown's diagnosis of the conflicted contemporary culture. Beverly Voloshin argues that Brown desired not to "reject the gothic form [so much] as to naturalize it" ("*Edgar Huntly* and the Coherence of the Self" [262]).

[23] Shuffleton and Ferguson focus on law; Koenig on education; Cahill and Galluzzo on aesthetics and imagination; Hinds and Shapiro (*Culture and Commerce*) on economics; Kamrath ("Art") on historiography; Faherty on architecture; and Downes, Looby, and Wolfe on democratic processes.

[24] A recent overview finds that current Brown criticism generally breaks down into two camps: Brown as partisan and Brown as diagnostician. See Bryan Waterman's "Reading Early America with Charles Brockden Brown," an introduction to a Brown-centric issue of *Early American Literature*.

[25] The passage is from William Hazlitt's "William Ellery Channing's Sermons and Tracts," originally published in *Edinburgh Review*, October 1829, and reprinted in Rosenthal (60).

[26] Pattee (xli), Fiedler 155.

[27] Several other critical commentaries on Brown's works use the term grotesque. Without using the word, however, Brown critics commonly express the idea of the grotesque as captured in Ludmila Foster's definition: "We call a literary work 'grotesque' when it produces upon us an effect of something distorted, absurd, incongruous, or estranged; when something is presented to us not only as different from what it is, or from what it might be, but is also presented in a way which does not fit our familiar logical or imaginative pattern."

[28] Umberto Eco makes this observation in *On Ugliness*.

[29] Hirst's piece is called *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*.

[30] See the discussion of Russo's ideas regarding the female grotesque in Edwards and Graulund (14-15).

[31] Harpham, Barasch, and Eco each underscore the importance of understanding the grotesque within its cultural and historical context.

[32] Brown predicts an expansion of the economic and political connections among the different parts of the world toward a global community. He notes the reigning Western ignorance of China, "Corea" [sic], and

Japan and the future importance of Western relations with Asia as the world moves toward what we would call globalization.

[33] In his article "The 1790s: The Effulgence of the Gothic," Robert Miles writes, "After 1794 a new sense of modernity emerged as the inrushing of an unrecoverable chaos. Hester Piozzi's contemporary sense of this moment is worth attending to: 'science herself suffered from revolutions; and taste, no longer classical, cried out for German plays and novels of a new sort, filled with what the Parisians call . . . *phantasmagoria*'" (54). Miles also notes, "In Paris [in 1795], the spectral technologist Etienne-Gaspard Robertson played the role of the Armenian [in Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer*] by staging a show (for which he coined the buzz-phrase phantasmagoria) in which the apparitional tricks of the Illuminati were exposed" (51).

[34] For the following discussion of eighteenth-century science I am drawing from the works of William E. Burns *Science in the Enlightenment, An Encyclopedia*; *The Science of Liberty* by Timothy Ferris; and *The Invention of Air* by Steven Johnson. My phrasing in this passage alludes to Cotton Mathers's *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), in which he recounted the court testimony of the torments of innocents imposed by the invisible hand of Satan or of his followers. Mather, although a defender of the admittance of spectral evidence in the Salem witchcraft trials, actually championed the idea that philosophy and science could coexist with religion. He was, for example, an early proponent of inoculation as a measure against the smallpox.

[35] See his essay "Yellow Fever" (*Literary Magazine* I. 1 [Oct. 1803]: 8-9). Brown's discussion of men of science rushing to conclusion suggests that science had not fully evolved into the rigorous, intensely self-scrutinizing method it would later become.

[36] In "Empiricism and King's Evil" Brown addresses the Mesmer controversy, arguing that the "grand point" to be considered is that in a number of cases the treatment effected a good outcome, even if it came via what we now call the placebo effect. Here (and implicitly in his fiction), imagination has its benefits, he argues; and, in some instances, it would be perverse to insist upon the rule of reason. See "A Student's Diary [VII]" *Literary Magazine* 2.8 May (1804): 85.

[37] See Bellion 5.

[38] James Blondel's *The Strength of the Imagination in Pregnant Women* (1727), quoted in Burns' *Science in the Enlightenment*. Cahill's discussion of the force of the imagination genre appears in his monograph *Liberty of the Imagination*.

[39] Dashwood was painted by Hogarth, a probable member. Ben Franklin may have attended a few meetings while in London. See Daniel Mannix's sensationalist account published in the 1960s.

[40] Cagliostro was recommended as a physician to Ben Franklin during his time in Paris. Casanova recorded meeting him. *The Ghost-seer*'s Sicilian is based on him.

[41] Henry Home, Lord Kames *Elements of Criticism* originally published in 1762 (excerpted in Robert E. Spiller's *The American Literary Revolution, 1783-1837* [1967]).

[42] Although we would not put Montaigne in the same category with religionists, his response to monsters, as Harpham observes, is one of wonder and humility in the face of "infinite wisdom" (Harpham 104).

[43] Although the materialist French *philosophes*, including Helvetius, d'Holbach, and Condorcet exemplify this faith in reason, the British proto-anarchist William Godwin may be the era's most optimistic of reason's devotees.

[44] The term *ideology* is credited to Antoine DeStutt de Tracy who coined it in a 1796 work *Elements d'ideology*.

[45] The most salient manifestation of this conflict in the English press was Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and the many responses it provoked, including Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Rights of Woman*, and William Godwin's *Political Justice*.

[46] See, for example David Lee Clark's biography of Brown and Ernest Marchand's article "The Literary Opinions of Charles Brockden Brown."

[47] Critics Christopher Looby, Shirley Samuels, and Robert S. Levine are among those who see Brown's novels reflecting conservative views, while Philip Barnard, Stephen Shapiro, and Mark L. Kamrath, for example, see them as socially-progressive and even subversive.

[48] In his essay "Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions," Hedges refers to Brown as being made "somewhat schizophrenic by pressures on him to conform" to "conventional pieties" and argues that Brown's novels reflect his only intermittently successful attempts to come to terms with his confusing times (116).

[49] Warner Berthoff, Cathy N. Davidson, and Chad Luck are among those who hold this view.

[50] Krzychylkiewicz writes that in the first half of the eighteenth century, with the emergence of neo-classicism, "The grotesque acquired negative connotations and signified everything that was considered deformed, macabre, ugly, unnatural, ridiculous and absurd, unless used strictly as a technical term in criticism" (7).

[51] Goya's famous nightmare scene *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* could be the epitome of the civic humanist artist's worldview.

[52] In one literary review, Brown writes of "the adaptation of images and allusions of a remote and uncultivated age, to the events and characters of the most enlightened and improved." "The scrupulous," he observes, "might deem such combinations uncouth, grotesque, and, perhaps, debasing." ("[Review of] The Death of George Washington, a Poem. By John Blair Linn" rpt. In *Literary Essays and Reviews* 85).

[53] Some recent scholarly interest has turned to the usefulness of the concept of the grotesque in examining American literature of the nineteenth century. Mary M. Balkun offers a useful overview of this trend that includes works by Leonard Cassuto and Gary D. Engle and often centers on constructions of the racial other.

[54] Smith's diary contains detailed records of the topics discussed in each meeting. Extensive portraits of the Friendly Club members and accounts of its activities can be found in Waterman's *Republic of Intellect* and Kaplan's *Men of the Republic of Letters*.

[55] In "On Rereading *Wieland*: 'The Folly of Precipitate Conclusions,'" Cynthia Jordan argues that a purposeful lack of a sense of an ending, dramatized, for example, through characters' failure to locate and consult some written document, suggests that Brown counsels a more deliberate, less precipitate approach to the unfamiliar.

[56] James Dawes, exploring the question of why we read scary stories, argues that Brown's major fiction reveals that the seeming disconnect between emotion (fear) and belief (this is only a fiction, not real) arises from a bifurcation in psychical being. Dawes draws from philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience to offer a theory of just how the semi-autonomous aspects of consciousness interact in such a way as to allow for the pleasurable manipulation of strong non-rational reactions, especially fear. Brown's novels, he argues, are "among the most brilliant examinations [. . .] of what happens when readers read," revealing that without a special exertion of skepticism "we will believe almost anything we tell ourselves" (437, 462). Brown, it seems, intuitively grasps the self-defensive and self-gratifying operations at work in popular literary forms.

[57] Michael G. Ditmore suggests that certain aspects of Brown's writing long considered stylistically flawed, including the use of passive voice constructions, may be thought of as a part of the narrator's rhetorical strategy of deflecting her own culpability, whether consciously or not. See his unpublished paper "The Grammar of Gothic Victimhood: Clara's Passive Vocality in *Wieland*" presented at the Charles Brockden Brown Society's Seventh Biennial Conference, October 21-23, 2010. I suggest that the grammatical shift in agency may just as likely convey in a disinterested and accurate way the narrator's experience of a dissociation of her actions from her conscious intentions.

Notes for Chapter 2

[58] The account appeared in the *New-York Weekly Magazine; or Miscellaneous Repository*, July 20 and 27, 1796 and was reprinted in the Philadelphia *Minerva*, August 20 and 27, 1796. Alan Axelrod, in his *Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale* (1983), offers an extensive comparison of the original with Brown's version.

[59] Carl van Doren made the case for its correct deduction in his article "Early American Realism" in the journal *Nation*, November 12, 1914. However, Annie Russell Marble was, according to Ernest Marchand, "the first to call attention" to the Yates account and its probable use as a source for Wieland (Introduction to *Ormond* xlix). The anonymous review, Barnard and Shapiro claim, was likely written by Brown's close friend William Dunlap, who would have known that the account was making the rounds through Brown's circle at the time of the novel's composition. Elihu Smith records in his diary that he was reading the account in July of 1798, the same period during which he was also correcting proofs of *Wieland* (Introduction to *Wieland* 455).

[60] See David Lee Clark's biography and Warner Berthoff's "'Lessons on Concealment'" for examinations of Brown's critique of superstition. William M. Manly argues that Brown's deist influences underlie his dramatization of the narrator's rationalism and scientific objectivity faltering and almost expiring under waves of emotionalism and superstition before being restored to a healthy "cause-and-effect sanity" (321). In "The Voices of *Wieland*," Bernard Rosenthal argues that Brown targets not merely religious excess but more particularly revealed religion. Leigh Eric Schmidt argues that although Brown debunks superstition he also portrayed the danger of the rationalists' elitist dehumanization of religionists.

[61] See Jane Tompkins' seminal *Sensational Designs*, which offers a reading of *Wieland* as a sort of Federalist political tract. Christopher Looby argues that *Wieland* is a conservative, counterrevolutionary text, a critique of the inherent instability of reason-based republican subjectivity (*Voicing America*). Paul Downes's article "Constitutional Secrets: 'Memoirs of Carwin' and the Politics of Concealment" (1997) examines Brown's unfinished sequel to *Wieland*, a story of the biloquist's relationship with a member of a clandestine political sect, "as a source of insight into the transformation of the political subject in the late-eighteenth century United States" (91).

[62] Cathy N. Davidson argues that "Brown, soon after the inception of the novel in America, wrote metafiction, fiction about the making of fictions—the writer's, the character's, the reader's, and the nation's" (*Revolution and the Word* 355). Jay Fliegelman argues that "Brown is ultimately offering one of the earliest analyses of the workings of 'ideology'" (xxxvi). Steve Hamelman calls the author a "self-reflexive 'metafictionist'" ("Rhapsodist in the Wilderness" 175). See also Frank Shuffleton, Emory Elliot, Nancy Ruttenburg, and Edward Cahill.

[63] In *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the Atlantic World-System* (2008), Steven Shapiro links the rise of the early American novel to the emergence of the socio-economically distinct mid-Atlantic cities of New York, Baltimore, and particularly Philadelphia where merchants and bankers enriched by the re-export trade spurred development of the region's cultural and ideological identity, one not beholden to patrician New England or the aristocratic South. Using the lens of cultural materialism, he finds in Brown's novels a critical analysis of the world-systems (trans-Atlantic economies) that produce local effects (a distinct economy and culture). Offering "an alternative political framework for the emergence of the American novel," Ed White's article "Carwin the Peasant Rebel" (2004) presents Brown not as the "bourgeois nationalist" but as a "burgeoning historical materialist" interested in the

"nexus of class formation, geography, material conditioning, and social structure" (44). *Wieland*, White argues, explores the development of national identity against the counter-narratives embodied in backcountry rebellions and the rural subaltern.

[64] Kamrath uses these terms in his helpful review of Brown criticism from the late 1970s through 2000, which is included in the essay collection *Profils Amércain: Charles Brockden Brown* (1999).

[65] Robert S. Levine, for example, sees in *Wieland* a Bakhtinian exploration of multi-voice discourse that expresses the author's counter-subversion anxieties (*Conspiracy and Romance* [1989]: 27-31). Nicholas Rombes, however, sees the thematic of narrative breakdown as a critique specifically of Federalist authority and thus reads *Wieland* as suggesting the possibility of radical democracy, a new political relation based upon "assimilation and plurality" ("All Was Lonely, Darksome and Waste" [1994] 45). In more recent articles, Galluzzo, Gale, and Leeuwen, each examining different particularities of Carwin's representations, take a similar view of *Wieland* as challenging the underlying patriarchal attitudes of Federalist narratives and gesturing toward a space for alternative (more liberal) political systems. Eric A. Wolfe contrasts his reading of *Wieland* with that of Jane Tompkins and of Christopher Looby, each of whom see the text as a Federalist critique of the dangers of populist oratory, of the ventriloquial power of demagogues who can speak through the mouths of others. Wolfe argues, "While the novel reveals the power of the voice in fostering illusions of identity, it also suggests the dangers of insisting too stridently on the need for a unified identity" (437). To Wolfe, the novel is a political statement challenging the drive toward unity that produced the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts.

[66] Halttunen does not directly address Brown's novel but cites Carwin as an early example of the misshapen Gothic villain whose physical deformity betokens moral monstrosity (47). I am arguing that Carwin and *Wieland* resist the conventional moral structure Halttunen so usefully delineates.

[67] Hagenbüchle argues that Brown, challenging the optimistic Lockean epistemology, originated the limited-point-of-view technique in American literature and in Clara produced its first unreliable narrator.

[68] Clara's history begins with her family's noble lineage; her grandfather, disowned by his parents after he married a merchant's daughter, turned to musical and dramatic compositions to make a living, becoming, she tells us, "the founder of the German Theatre" (7). Another relative was the real-life "modern poet of the same name," whom readers would have understood to be Christoph Martin Wieland, who was thought of in the 1790s as the preeminent figure in the German enlightenment. C. M. Wieland's *Der geprufte Abraham* (1753) was a verse treatment of the biblical story of the devoted patriarch, a story with obvious parallels to the Yates and Wieland affairs. Multiple British editions in English (many available on this side of the Atlantic) were produced through the end of the century. John Trumbull's translation *The Trial of Abraham* was published in Connecticut in 1778.

[69] Clara is a practitioner of physiognomy, the reading of facial features as signs of personal qualities. She adheres also to eighteenth-century notions of associative sentiment, described by Barnard and Shapiro as "the folk-theoretical construct" in which non-verbal cues are read to ascertain the character, thoughts, and feelings of others. After she had confronted him with accusations of his alleged crimes, Clara reflectively notes, "Carwin's eyes glared, and his limbs were petrified at this intelligence. No words were requisite to prove him guiltless of these enormities: at the time, however, I was nearly insensible to these exculpatory tokens" (197).

[70] See Norman S. Grabo's examination of the resolute moral uncertainty in *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown* (1981), especially 9-10 and 25. John Cleman, in "Ambiguous Evil: A Study of Villains and Heroes in Charles Brockden Brown's Major Novels" (1975), argues cogently that a pervasive ambiguity characterizes (almost) all of Brown's supposed bad guys—and good guys.

[71] In his influential article "'Saying Makes It So': Language and Event in Brown's *Wieland*" (1978), Mark Seltzer examines the novel's breakdown of causal relations and Clara's own doubts about whether her narrative is serving to disclose causality or instead merely imposing a "chain of connection" upon the series of events. See also Cynthia S. Jordan's "On Rereading *Wieland*: 'The Folly of Precipitate Conclusions'"

(1981) for an examination of the ways in which Brown's novels repeatedly deprive characters and readers of a sense of an ending. On the assumption that the novel is intended as a classical tragedy, Nina Baym offers an exhaustive analysis of the ways in which *Wieland* utterly fails as an example of the genre, concluding that it is the work of a hack who sacrifices artistry and coherence for mere sensationalism.

[72] As such it is quite understandable that not a little of the critical response to *Wieland* finds the work structurally flawed and thematically incoherent. Especially before the more recent reconsideration and reevaluation of Brown's writings, critics, even those otherwise favorably disposed, felt the need to explain or apologize for what was commonly accepted as obvious artistic failings. Flaws were attributed to the extrinsic circumstances of the work's rushed composition—the printer was calling for more as Brown was hurriedly finishing the final chapters—or to the author's intrinsic factors: carelessness (Fiedler), lack of artistic expertise (Pattee), lack of intellectual seriousness (Baym), or intellectual and emotional ambivalence (Hedges, Seltzer, Crain).

[73] In his *Liberty and the Imagination,* Edward Cahill explains that the "twin poles of understanding that informed the theory of the imagination in the eighteenth century" were 1) "a supreme spiritual faculty" and 2) a "complex psychological organ" (173). "He [Brown] could see it as a supreme spiritual faculty or a complex physiological organ; but most often he saw it as something in between," Cahill argues (173). Brown's earlier, Rousseauistic writings ("The Rhapsodist") reflect the former before his readings of French materialists like Condorcet and d'Holbach in the early 1790s and his introduction to Strutt, Hartley (through Priestley's abridgement), and Boerhaave (through physician friends Davidson and Smith) (175). He adds, "Where Hartley's association merely links the mind with the body, Boerhaave understands it as capable of acting on other bodies as well. Thus, emotions like joy, sadness, and fear are not merely felt or expressed but take on an agency of their own, potentially circulating between individuals and across whole communities" (176). Cahill is speaking here of emotions like joy, sadness and fear, not language or ideas. I, however, trace the ripple effect of the transformation of ideas and words into material reality across social groups not just individuals; thus, one person's words echo and amplify throughout the group taking on monstrous materiality.

[74] Indeed, Bernard Rosenthal points out that despite his earlier presentiments of a heavenly punishment, the elder Wieland describes the incident solely in terms of an attack from a person (a faint gleam as if from a lamp, a pain as if struck from behind by someone wielding a club) and specifically notes that the igniting spark fell upon his clothes, which is inconsistent with the more wondrous internal cause considered by Clara and perhaps most often assumed by readers. See "The Voices of *Wieland*" in *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown*.

[75] Compare the inconclusiveness of Brown's novel to the revelations of the "true" story, the discovery of a supernatural or natural explanation, behind the initial misinterpretations and false conjectures in other Gothic narratives. *Wieland*, generically considered, is neither fantastical Gothic, like Walpole's story of ghosts, nor is it (satisfactorily) explained supernaturalism, like Radcliffe's works. In his biography on Brown, William Dunlap, the writer's friend, addresses the relative strangeness (and for some the unsatisfying nature) of *Wieland*'s explanations for appearances:

> A doubt has been suggested of the propriety or policy of resorting to such tremendous agents in the conduct of the novel. It is true that they are in nature, but to the generality of mankind, they appear more strange, if not more unnatural, than ghosts or specters. The instances of self-combustion or ventriloquism, are so rare, that a work whose events are founded on such materials, accords less with popular feelings and credulity, than if supernatural agency had been employed. (*The Life of Charles Brockden Brown* 12-15)

Moreover, as critics have noted, the strangeness arises not only from the use of these devices, these "tremendous agents," but from the fact that they fail to definitively explain appearances. Contra Godwin's faith in the mind's power to ascertain truth, as dramatized in his Gothic *Caleb Williams*, *Wieland* provides no access to objective truth, only narratives of more or less probability. Scholar Michael T. Gilmore responds to this lack of certainty by asserting, "Many of the 'facts' in Brown's tale are improbable to the point of arousing disbelief, and his appeals to evidence often have the air of privates jokes" ("Calvinism and Gothicism" 645).

[76] See Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). Selections from Burke's writings, as well as those by other influential thinkers, including Mark Akenside, Shaftesbury, and Lord Kames are collected in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (1996) edited by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla.

[77] In the influential *Elements of Criticism* (1762), Henry Home, Lord Kames argues, "A taste in the fine arts goes hand in hand with the moral sense, to which indeed it is nearly allied. [. . .] Nor ought it to be overlooked that the reasonings employed on the fine arts are of the same kind with those which regulate our conduct" (*Elements of Criticism* I:7, 10 and quoted in Shuffleton 92)

[78] See Edward Cahill's *Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States* (2012) (especially chapter 4) on the Federalists' use of the aesthetic ideal of the sublime to argue for a universal equality of human potential while still maintaining a quasi-aristocratic hierarchy based on the meritorious individual refinement of this universal sensibility. Anthony Galluzzo points out that, of course, the safe spot from which one may contemplate awe-inducing phenomena can be won and maintained through decidedly interested violence. Galluzzo reads Carwin's deceptions as exploding the Wieland group's self-satisfaction, exposing the material advantages underwriting the supposedly disinterested enjoyment of the Kantian sublime.

[79] Eighteenth-century thinkers, greatly influenced by John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), sought to reconcile the mind-body split through investigations of the relation of physical sensation and mental processes. David Hartley, father of the associative psychology alluded to in several places in the narrative, held that the body still had a place in the constitution of one's self. He argues, however, that it is merely the intermediary between the mind and the material world. Through a process of association, sensory transmissions combine to form complex ideas and eventually consciousness. This consciousness then is capable of increasingly complex and subtle refinement and thus of being further and further abstracted from simple bodily mechanics. Through this process, all individuals may move toward becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (qtd. in Richard Allen's entry for *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). See Hartley's influential *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749).

[80] The exchange that occurs with Carwin's first entrance upon the stage is appropriately open to multiple interpretations. As we later learn, Carwin had already established a meretricious relationship with Judith; his request for buttermilk to relieve his thirst, therefore, can plausibly be read as a euphemistic reference to breast milk and by extension a request for access to her bosom. When the girl tells him there is no buttermilk in the house, he persists, saying, "Ay, but there is some in the dairy yonder" and adds, "Thou knowest as well as I, though Hermes never taught thee, that though every dairy be an house, every house is not a dairy," implying perhaps that the two should go to the barn for a roll in the hay. When Clara notes that the girl seemed to have only a partial understanding of these words, we might infer that she, more educated than her young servant girl, understands the salacious insinuation.

But Carwin's rhetorical flourish supports meanings beyond those likely to be intended or inferred by any at the scene. The phrasing, particularly the reference to Hermes, directs the auditor to a body of knowledge (classical mythology) to divine the true underlying meaning; however, intentionally or not, it also points to and exemplifies the complexity and uncertainty of interpretation. The Greek god Hermes, he of the winged sandals, is the patron of travelers; he is also associated in some myths with both cattle and breast milk (noted by Barnard and Shapiro, 46-7, n. 4 and 5). Carwin's comment may, therefore, refer to the knowledge of travelers (like himself) about where to look for needful things, including sex. If so, Carwin's reference is doubly apt and evinces a learned mastery of language and a confident, uninhibited sexuality. Or does it? Carwin's words, if indeed calculated to seduce, fail him miserably. Not only does he not acquire what he sought from Judith, he also may be unwittingly giving himself away. Hermes is the messenger of the Gods, both between the gods and between the gods and humans; and as such he is an apt type for Carwin in his role as supernatural informant. Hermes is the patron of interpreters, as well. (He is the eponym of the systematic practice or study of interpretation, hermeneutics.) But Hermes is also a figure of the trickster, enjoying as he does the discomfort of the confused receiver of ambiguous messages. At some point, Carwin is associated with all these roles—traveler, thief, interpreter, trickster—although it is

unlikely he is intentionally alluding to his secret biloquial adventures. Thus, unable to control language or desire, the initially impressive Carwin subsequently appears as a mere mortal who suffers from his hubristic assumption of god-like attributes.

However, in his article "'Though Hermes Never Taught Thee': The Anti-Patriarchal Tendency of Charles Brockden Brown's Mercurial Outcast Carwin, the Biloquist," Evert Jan van Leeuwen interprets the reference quite differently, claiming Carwin's remark associates him with Hermes Trismegistus, a legendary figure possibly based on an ancient Egyptian prophet, to whom is attributed the writings that are the basis of a philosophic-religious tradition associated with alchemy, astrology, and theurgy, that is, magic. Leeuwen argues Carwin should be seen as a "marginalized utopian idealist" whose "oxymoronic identity" undermines the vestigial patriarchal ideology of the early republic. Interestingly, in the Hermetic tradition black magic is accomplished by means of controlling a dæmon, a notion alluded to in *Wieland* in the conjectures about the phantom voices (180). Also, the Hermetic writings tell of Hermes Trismegistus's direct dialogue with God in which the sage is given the secrets of the workings of the physical universe. Thus, this reference, too, echoes the divine revelation plot. (In this discussion of Brown's novel as debunking Enlightenment-era binary thinking, it is interesting to note that Isaac Newton, whose work helped sparked the Age of Reason, drew inspiration for his search for the laws of nature from his study of the occult Hermetic corpus, a fact that would seem to blur the distinction between ostensible opposites, magic and science.)

[81] See Rosemarie Garland Thomson on the effect of the extraordinary body on conceptions of selfhood. Nancy Ruttenburg references the conservative religionists' view of virtue as the "integrity of visible character and invisible identity" (rpt. in Waterman's edition of *Wieland*, 439).

[82] For a similar reading see Galluzzo.

[83] In her monograph *Private Property: Charles Brockden Brown's Gendered Economics of Virtue*, Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds argues that the incestuous dynamic in *Wieland* serves as a socio-economic symbol representing the economics and associated virtues of the isolated landed class (101-16).

[84] In "The Importance of Point of View in Brockden Brown's *Wieland*" (1963), William M. Manly, reading the novel as a staunch defense of normalcy, objectivity, and rationality, maintains that the pit in Clara's dream represents the gulf of insanity and argues that certain critics (he references Leslie Fiedler and Larzer Ziff) have insisted on reading incestuous desire into the dream "despite a complete lack of objective evidence for it within the novel" (318). Although Manly can be credited with an early recognition of the text's thematic focus on the characters' perceptions of events, his conviction that incestuous desire has no part in the novel is not reflected in subsequent criticism. Perhaps most baldy, James D. Wilson argues "the dream becomes a vehicle for expressing the subconscious, for crystallizing her latent incestuous love for Theodore" ("Incest and American Romantic Fiction" 38). Additional explicit references to the incestuous dynamic at Mettingen appear in the critical works of Cowie, Weldon, Lloyd-Smith, Elliot, Fliegelman, Christophersen, Hinds, Chapman, and others too numerous to specify.

[85] In *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown* (1981), Norman S. Grabo traces the psychodrama of Clara's dilemma, arguing that she is caught between an irrational desire for union with her brother in their shared legacy of "obedience, duty, and guilt," and her undeniable desire for independence, which is embodied in the lawlessness of Carwin. "The choice of either is impossible, and the impossibility is put in essentially sexual terms," he argues (27). But whereas Grabo suggests that the incestuous impulse to identify with her kinsmen is symptomatic of an inherited psychological pathology, I see Brown's novel portraying that inheritance as an ideological pathology shared much more broadly among all the children of the Enlightenment.

[86] Alan Lloyd-Smith too infers a link between the murder spree and an illicit sexuality: "Wieland's brutal destruction of his wife and children, and projected murder of Clara, suggest clearly enough a pattern of repressed incestuous desire, emerging explosively at the point when Clara moves toward independence and sexual initiation" (*American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* 42).

[87] Hagenbüchle argues that after the incident at the recess "Pleyel began to assume the possibility that there were two Claras: the pure woman on the one side and the profligate creature on the other (a variant of the 'light and dark lady' formula). His loss of faith in Clara, therefore, is nothing less than the loss of faith in the continuity of identity as such" (133).

[88] Associative psychology, as propounded and popularized in David Hartley's *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749), is founded on the Lockean idea that behaviors arise from empirically discoverable sources, stimuli which trigger a chain reaction of vibrations traveling through the nervous system to the brain.

[89] Note that Brown does not use the spelling *Catherine* for Wieland's wife, but the less common *Catharine*, possibly so as to associate her more clearly with the Cathars, another name for the Albigenses referenced in the novel's first chapter. This dualistic Christian sect was labeled heretical by the Roman Catholic Church and made the target of an exterminating campaign in the early thirteenth century. The conflict was marked by atrocities attributed to both sides, thus placing the Wieland story in the context of other bloody and cruel deeds committed in the name of God. Moreover, the Cathars's belief in the absolute corruption of all matter parallels Wieland's apparent desire to transcend the corrupt material world and achieve a spiritual perfection through his sacrifice of all earthly treasures, including that "last and best gift" from God, his wife (172). Both *Cathar* and *Catharine* derive from the Greek word meaning *perfection*; as such the wife's name could serve to underscore Wieland's rape and murder of her as an ironic destruction of the spiritual perfection he sought.

[90] In "'The Awe-creating Presence of the Deity': Some Religious Sources for Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*" (1997), Marshall N. Surratt examines the Zinzendorf reference, arguing that it serves "four purposes—besides being a convenient stand-in for Pennsylvania Quakers, who tended to remove themselves from social and political matters." In sum, the Moravian wife would underscore by contrast the excesses and failures of the even more isolated husband, although she too would pass along a separatist disposition. Also, the source of the father's religious views, the French Protestants, would tap into fears of "the emotional excesses of the French Revolution" (312). Editors Barnard and Shapiro, reflecting their critical interest in the dynamics of socio-economic stratification and subaltern uprisings, point to the Zinzendorf reference as the "final link in the chapter's lengthy set of allusions to insurrectionary Christian schisms" (13, n. 20). My reading of the secondary literature on Brown has uncovered no reference to the Moravian's striking treatment of the sexual and the sacred.

[91] Brown includes another Zinzendorf allusion, in addition to the Lusatia ties. The immediate series of events that culminate in Wieland's massacre begins when Pleyel fails to appear for a planned rehearsal of a newly arrived play. That play, featured at a crucial moment in the narrative, deals with "the exploits of the Zisca, the Bohemian hero," who was a follower of Jan Hus, the founder of the Moravian sect lead over three hundred years later by Zinzendorf (78).

[92] See Paul Peucker's "Inspired by Flames of Love": Homosexuality, Mysticism and Moravian Brothers around 1750" (2006).

[93] Michael T. Gilmore, in "Calvinism and Gothicism: The Example of Brown's *Wieland*" (1977), argues, "So extensive, in fact, are the parallels between *Wieland* and *Paradise Lost* that it is hard to imagine how they have been overlooked" (112). But his argument is for the novel's rather direct reiteration of the story of the Fall, with Carwin in the role of Satan and Clara as "the novelist's American Eve" (112). Gilmore finds that the novel's core concern is with "the mutual failure of Clara and Pleyel to assume responsibility for their transgressions" (114), which he examines in terms of a lack of sincerity, "a reluctance of sinful man to lay bare his heart" (115). My argument parallels Gilmore's in reading the novel as critiquing any narrowly legalistic view of responsibility.

[94] Alexander Cowie finds echoes of Milton in certain phrases in *Wieland* and argues Brown aspired to the "grandeur and magnitude and the 'moral sublimity' which he so admired" in the great English poet (Cowie "Historical Essay" in *Wieland* 316). *Ormond*, Brown's next novel, includes two mentions of Milton. And in a passage of *Arthur Mervyn*, Brown draws directly from Milton's epic. When Arthur enters the market-

house for the first time at night, he describes feeling as if "transported to the hall 'pendent with many a row of starry lamps and blazing crescents fed by naphtha and asphaltos,'" which is an imperfect quotation of Book I, 727-30 (*Arthur Mervyn* 28). Although it cannot be definitively attributed to Brown, admiration of Milton's work is expressed at length in an anonymous article printed in Brown's *Literary Magazine*:

> I have now in my hands an old copy of Milton, which at first belonged to my father. It is an old book, and few volumes have been oftener in my hands. I would not exchange it for an edition of the same work embellished by all the arts of the printer, the engraver, and the binder. [. . .] Milton is only inferior to the voice of inspiration. He is first among the poets who were not prophets. [. . .] I consider the relish for the poetry of Milton as a criterion of the taste and mental elevation of the reader. [. . .] I could fill a volume in speaking of Milton, so keen is my sensibility to his excellencies, so great is the instruction and pleasure which I have received from him. I have marked many of his passages in my almost worn-out copy. [. . .] To these I sometimes recur with satisfaction; they are mementos of former periods which have been passed in converse with the mighty bard, and of some hours of dejection which were lightened by his voice. (*Literary Magazine* of October, 1803 quoted in Warfel's biography 225)

Further, in a review of a 1799 Fourth of July oration, Brown quotes "the sublime and forcible language of the poet [Milton]"—specifically, a passage from Book II immediately preceding the introduction of Satan's daughter and describing Hell as the place "Where all life dies, death lives and nature breeds / Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things, / Abominable, inutterable, and worse / Than fables yet have feigned, or fear conceived, / Gorgons, and hydras, and chimeras dire"—to mock the orator's rather overheated conception of the horrors and menaces of revolutionary France ("[Review of] An Oration [. . .] by John Lowell" rpt. in *Literary Essays and Reviews* 30-41). In another article, "On the Portraits of Death," Brown begins with a quotation from the Satan-Sin-Death passage in *Paradise Lost*. The piece itself demonstrates that though Brown was a great admirer, he retained his critical stance as a freethinker. Here he argues that the poet's (and others') portrayal of death as an imaginary personage shows a thoughtless lack of propriety and reasonableness. Milton attributes to Death characteristics ("black as night," "fierce as ten furies," and "terrible as hell") that may impart a certain sublimity, Brown argues, but are nonsensical (rpt. in *Literary Essays and Reviews* 111). Milton's name appears twice in Brown's *Ormond*.

[95] Jean Hagstrum traces the characteristic fusion of sex and sensibility he finds in a wide range of eighteenth-century cultural productions to Milton's seminal work (13).

[96] Marcia R. Pointon argues that this is the "most widely illustrated episode" in her *Milton and English Art* (1970), cited in Hagstrum (283, n. 12).

[97] Cleman argues that, despite his conscious intentions, Wieland's sacrifices are "in the final analysis, selfish acts": "Wieland is willing to place his own contact with God above the happiness and safety of his sister, wife, and children" (203).

[98] Elsewhere Brown uses volcanic imagery in a discussion of chaos and the world's end. See "The Difference between History and Romance" (*Monthly Magazine* [April 1800], rpt. in *Literary Essays and Reviews* 83-5).

[99] For critical recognition of the circular trajectory of the narrative see articles by Marshall N. Surratt, Ed White, and Stephen Shapiro.

Notes for Interlude

[100] A scholarly edition of his poems, a volume in *The Collected Works of Charles Brockden Brown*, is currently in the works.

[101] See David Lee Clark's *Charles Brockden Brown, Pioneer Voice of America*.

[102] Smith had previously met Scandella in New York on Jan. 22, 1798, and the two had maintained a correspondence. See his *Diary* (420).

[103] See Heaton "Yellow Fever in New York City."

[104] See Cowie's "Historical Essay" in the Kent State Bicentennial Edition of *Wieland.*

Notes for Chapter 3

[105] Christophersen calls her "a paradigm of virtue and common sense" (*Apparition* 55). Bannet examines Constantia as one of several fictional embodiments of the virtue of constancy in 1790s literature.

[106] Gordon S. Wood calls the problem of deception "a source of continuing fascination in the eighteenth-century Anglo-American culture" (106).

[107] Constantia is forced to endure "exposure to rude eyes" (31) and being "exposed, by her situation, to the danger of being mistaken by the profligate of either sex, for one of their own class" (32). In her inquiries after Thomas Craig, she encounters a manservant who "put on an air of familiar ridicule, and surveyed her in silence" (94).

[108] See Bellion's *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, and Visual Perception in Early National America* (2011).

[109] Other literary works of the eighteenth century were not illusionistic in this way, were not transparent deceptions, but were instead accused of being utter frauds, invented to be passed off as authentic artefacts. In the most famous example, the Ossian poems, presented as transcriptions of Gaelic works from the third century, sparked a raging debate about their authenticity. Today they are widely believed to have been crafted in large part by the ostensible translator Scottish poet James Macpherson. The English teenager Thomas Chatterton's reputed discovery of ancient poems was revealed to be a similar misrepresentation.

[110] Russo does not address the detailed histories of Martinette or of Sophia and her mother, and the many textual details and thematic concerns that form the core of other readings do not figure in his argument. Still, it is hard not to admire the way in which he constructs a plausible counter-narrative connecting and explaining otherwise problematic elements. It must be noted, however, that although there appears to be nothing in the text to definitively disprove the version of events as Russo presents them, his alternative narrative is based on speculation at several points; and there likewise appears to be nothing to definitively prove his version is the true one. Russo is not alone in taking such an approach. As he points out, critics have similarly found alternative narratives behind the implausible or contradictory accounts offered by narrators in both *Arthur Mervyn* and *Edgar Huntly*. We can add *Wieland* to that number as well, with one critic speculating that Carwin committed the murders (David Lyttle "The Case against Carwin" *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 26 (1971): 257-69).

[111] See Paul Witherington's "Charles Brockden Brown: The American Artist and His Masquerade" (1976). Witherington argues that Brown, unlike Hawthorne and Poe, could not handle the dilemma of the artist who must reveal the truth of the human heart while also preserving its sanctity; torn between romanticism and neo-classicism, Brown comes close to validating radical moral positions before retreating into conventional morality by way of actual or symbolic suicides of his artist characters. Robert Levine writes, "Paul Witherington brings the villain-as-artist motif to a point of reductio ad absurdum: virtually every character in *Ormond*, in Witherington's judgment, is an artist" ("Villainy" 138, n. 8).

[112] Some see the novel suggesting alternative models, correctives, whether progressive or conservative, to reigning social ills. Shapiro, for example, sees Brown positing a queer collectivities model as a preserving measure against the ascendancy of conservative backlash against progressivism ("In a French Position").

[113] "Walstein's School of History" was originally published in Brown's *Monthly Magazine, and American Review* I.5 (Aug. 1799): 335-38 and I.6 (Sep. 1799): 407-11.

[114] The trope of visuality is there in the era's name, bestowed upon itself, the Age of the Enlightenment.

[115] The biographical sketch is actually a gallery of biographical sketches, Julia Stern points out, arguing that contemporary art genres, including miniatures, biographical portraits, and historical tableaux, offer the models for Brown's narrative structure (162-3). Stern focuses on a critique of the failure of fellow feeling, specifically of the Founders' kind of fraternity, as seen in the motif of the failure of vision.

[116] See also Mary Chapman (Introduction to *Ormond*) and Stephen Shapiro ("In a French Position") for recognition of the social-bonding uses of narrative exchange.

[117] Ellis writes, "Throughout the novel, for instance, many of the female characters are threatened with commodification and presented as objects of exchange, rather than as people to be loved" (13).

[118] Describing her reception in the elite circles of Vienna, the uncommonly educated Martinette explains, "Superficial observers were either incredulous with regard to my character, or connected a stupid wonder with their belief. My attainments and habits, they did not see to be perfectly consonant with the principles of human nature" (201).

[119] The "[Review of] Joan of Arc: An Epic Poem by Southey" (*Literary Essays and Reviews* 27) was originally published in the *Monthly Magazine* (I. 3 [June 1799] 225-29).

[120] The "[Review of] An Oration, spoken at Hartford, in Connecticut, on the Anniversary of American Independence, &c. By William Brown. Hartford. Hudson and Goodwin. 1799. pp. 23." was originally published in the July 1799 issue of *Monthly Magazine* 287-90. See also Brown's "Historical Characters Are False Representations of Nature," where he argues that prominent persons are often falsely represented in history books as self-motivating and not subject to the same passions as mere underlings.

[121] Plato explains that in the mimetic mode the poet produces an "assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture" (*Republic* III, qtd. in Ross 24). In the words of the French narrative theorist Gerard Genette, "the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances then are *merged*" (qtd. in Stevenson 32).

[122] The crossovers between art and life obtain on a meta-textual level as well. As with so many works of art, there are biographical notes here with characters drawn in part from the author's circle of friends. Stephen Dudley, the novel's painter, may be based on William Dunlap, Brown's painter friend. Elihu Hubbard Smith, like Dudley, is the son of an apothecary. Also, Brown scholars have pointed out that the Perth Amboy house is clearly modeled on the country residence of William Dunlap where Brown stayed just prior to beginning work on the novel. Barnard and Shapiro, in fact, argue that *Ormond* is a *roman a clef* or *roman a jeu*, providing a game of spot-the-allusion for Brown's acquaintances (Introduction to *Ormond* xxii).

[123] Similarly, Cahill, specifying Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, argues that the sudden transitions and transformations in Brown's novels suggest potentialities beyond the characters' previous conceptions: "Edgar's transitions have traumatized him, but they have also opened his eyes to modes of existence beyond his ken" (192).

[124] Sophia explains, "Constantia did not form her resolutions in haste, but when once formed, they were exempt from fluctuation. She reflected before she acted, and therefore acted with consistency and vigour" (146-7). See Layson on these features of Constantia's thought, her reliance on rational autonomy, being a target of Brown's critique. In Constantia's rationalistic attitude and her susceptibility to bias in her reasoning, the novel "implicitly raises questions about Constantia's own commitment to reason as the guide to ethical conduct" (177).

[125] Brown's "Yellow Fever" is one section of an "Extract from a Student's Diary (I)" (*Literary Magazine* I. 1 [Oct. 1803]).

[126] This, of course, rehearses the ruse of the Girondist assassin of Marat, Charlotte Corday, who gained access to the Jacobin leader by claiming a false identity as a sympathizer with his cause. She stabbed him

to death as he lay in the tub. She was caught, sentenced, and executed days later. Moreover, Martinette's plan reiterates the narrative's trope of role-playing and deceit. Most important however is the fact that, although viscerally repulsed by Martinette's declaration that she would both commit both murder and suicide in the name of defending liberty, Constantia will soon find herself contemplating the same actions in the name of defending her female honor. That she does so dramatizes the fact that her earlier emotional rejection of Martinette as a consequence of these revelations can be understood not as a moral incompatibility but as a clash between one reading of her interlocutor's features and deportment and another emergent reading. In the immediate response to Martinette's disclosure, Constantia evinces this dynamic of an evolving understanding of this person in the language of a "reflected" image that changes and of "likeness" once imagined now gone. Constantia's surprised reaction reveals that her conception of female sensibility is a projection out onto the world of human actions of a fixed discriminatory grid of gendered virtue. Her seeing or not seeing a likeness between herself and another (as with Martinette/Ursula, Hellen, Ormond, and Sophia) is less about the nature of one's relation to another and more about her conceptions (or readings) of the Not Me. Resemblances in the novel tend to point to the way in which her (or other observers') preconceptions or established field of reference pre-determine perceptions. Like everyone else, Constantia habitually contemplates the images in her mind, taking them to be the true reflection of a thing out there; but when the image conflicts with new experience, she finds it difficult to change her perceptions and her behaviors. Her almost immediate show of continued and even increased interest, however, suggests that she, unlike so many others, values the opportunity to move beyond this habitual operation of mind.

[127] "Objections to Richardson's Clarissa" originally appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* (III.5: 321-23).

[128] Bill Christophersen argues that Constantia is imprisoned in her sterile virtue, another of many paradoxes of the novel.

Notes for Chapter 4

[129] Readings by Kreyling and Scheick, for example, explore the ways in which Brown's novels exhibit something like a deconstructionist conception of the constructed-ness of truth. Hedges observes that Arthur Mervyn has no moral code by which to solve his dilemmas, knowing only that "the problem of morality cannot be completely separated from the problem of knowledge" (307).

[130] See articles by Hamelman and by Morris.

[131] See Richard P. Moses' "Quakerism in Charles Brockden Brown."

[132] See Warfel, Clark, and Kafer.

[133] *Address to the Congress of the United States* vi, January 1809. This and Brown's three other political pamphlets can be found on-line at *The Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive*.

[134] The term *Quaker* reputedly derives from the defiant retort of early Quaker George Fox who told the magistrates presiding over his trial for blasphemy that they should "tremble at the word of the Lord."

[135] Ernest Marchand observes that as a true Quaker son Brown eschewed polemics: "Controversial writing he distrusted, believing that preoccupation with one side of an abstract subject breeds intolerance, and suspicion of the knowledge and intentions of our opponents. 'Instead of concentering all our energies in argument . . . we are likely to deal too much in sarcasm and invective'" (Marchand "Literary Opinions of CBB" 546). The quote is from Brown's "[Review of] *Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases* by Noah Webster" (*Monthly Magazine*, II [Feb. 1800] 115). See also Brown's "Disputation" in *Literary Magazine* 1.2 (Nov. 1803): 85.

[136] Richmond P. Miller in Leo Rosten's *Religions of America* (218).

[137] See also Peter Kafer's biography of Brown for a comparison of Quaker and Godwinian thought (69-72). Kafer underscores the specifically political significance of the Quaker and Godwinian influence on Brown's character, on his rejection of party loyalty in favor of a duty to maintain allegiance to one's own judgment and to give respectful and intellectually honest hearing to all persons regardless of supposed distinctions: "In all, then Godwin's *Political Justice* offers a rigorous critique of the central principles of Lockean liberalism and the Whiggism of the American Revolution, and this critique was in profound accord with the historical experiences, and cultural values, of Pennsylvania's Quakers" (71).

[138] "Origins of Quakerism" *Literary Magazine* III. 18 (March 1805): 194-5.

[139] See Philp's "Introduction" to his 2013 edition of Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (xiii).

[140] Philp's "Introduction" to Godwin's *Political Justice* (xvii).

[141] See *Political Justice* (II.v. 67-72).

[142] In an oft-cited passage, Godwin writes, "Truth is in reality single and uniform. There must in the nature of things be one best form of government, which all intellects, sufficiently roused from the slumber of savage ignorance, will be irresistibly incited to approve. [. . .] Truth cannot be so variable, as to change its nature by crossing an arm of the sea, a petty brook or an ideal line, and become falsehood. On the contrary it is at all times and in all places the same" (IIIvii 102-103).

[143] Mark Philp observes that Godwin "was not a partisan or a polemicist: he sought dispassionately to assess the value of propositions and general ideas and claims" (Philp xix).

[144] See *Political Justice* (VIII. vii. 453-458).

[145] See Kafer for the dates of the New York publication of *Political Justice* extracts.

[146] See *Collected Writings of Charles Brockden Brown, vol. 1 Letters and Early Epistolary Writings* (*Letters*) (420, note 9).

[147] His phrasing here ("unfriendly") may or may not be a knock against the Friends or a nod to the Friendly Club or even a subtle suggestion that Bringhurst's position is not in the true spirit of Quakerism.

[148] Some of these, it may be noted, were or were to become positions taken or considered by professed Quakers, too. See Leo Rosten's *Religion in America* (213-43).

[149] See also a reiteration of the argument concerning the pernicious tendency of a belief in the rewards and punishments of an afterlife in Brown's letter to Bringhurst July 10, 1796 (*Letters* 355-359).

[150] In a follow-up letter dated October 30, Brown clarifies that he was referring to "Godwin's *Enquiry*" (*Letters* 314).

[151] See his letter to Joseph Bringhurst, Jr. May 11, 1796 (*Letters* 346-7).

[152] Brown's early "Reflections on Moralists and Moral Writing," published in March 1799, lists sincerity as the first of his criteria for a good writer. See, however, Berthoff's reading of Brown's ambivalence even on this topic as expressed in the short story "Lesson on Concealment." The unfinished piece referred to as the Adini fragment also touches upon practical considerations of allowing some erroneous beliefs to go uncorrected.

[153] In fact, as Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan explains, Smith committed to paper a detailed outline for a Utopia (he even called it such) that put into practice rationalist principles for "creating citizens sound of mind, body, and morals." Kaplan, who reproduced the unpublished work in a 2000 article, argues that "as

he wrote the utopia, he imagined it might serve as a blueprint for reforming the United States as a whole" (99).

[154] See the "Introduction" to *Literary Essays* (xv).

[155] See his advertisement for *Sky-Walk* ("Notice of a New Work") in Watter's *Weekly Magazine* (I.7 March 1798) and the prefatory "advertisement" for *Wieland* (3). The editors of *Charles Brockden Brown: Literary Essays and Reviews* assert that Brown was "more than a quarter of a century before Edgar Allan Poe, the first notable literary critic in the United States" (xi). Barnard and Shapiro make the claim that Brown's essay "Walstein's School of History" (1799) "arguably establishes Brown as the first modern U.S. literary critic, in the sense of one who explores how texts construct meaning and function in society rather than simply asserting the relative merits of literary productions judged against an imaginary standard of excellence" (*Ormond* 223).

[156] See Marchand's article "Charles Brockden Brown's Literary Theory."

[157] Some more recent criticism, including that by James Dillon, Mark Kamrath, Edward Cahill, and Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro, finds a more nuanced attitude toward the imagination, a recognition by Brown of both its creative and destructive potential.

[158] As Edward Cahill points out, "Lord Kames held that the 'ideal presence of' a compellingly written narrative engages the sympathy and passions as powerfully as the 'real presence' of objective experience. Indeed, because their power to affect our sympathy 'depends on the vivacity of ideas they raise,' Kames admits, 'fable is generally more successful than history.'" See *Liberty of the Imagination* 170. In her article "The Early American Novel: Charles Brockden Brown's Fictitious Historiography," Amanda Emerson quotes similar sentiments from Hugh Blair's lecture "On History Writing."

[159] Editors Barnard and Shapiro include the article in their editions of each of Brown's four major novels *Wieland*, *Ormond*, *Arthur Mervyn*, and *Edgar Huntly*. James Dillon's discussion of Charles Brockden Brown's literary theory focuses heavily on "Walstein's" as well as on two other commonly cited pieces "The Difference between History and Romance" and "Historical Characters Are False Representations of Nature," which I discuss further on. Steven Watts calls "Walstein's" Brown's "most coherent expression" of his "intent and focus as a novelist" (*The Romance of Real Life* 75).

[160] The line is from Brown's response appended to "Mr.[Noah] Webster's Letter to the Editor, on the review of his History of Pestilence" (*Literary Magazine* III. 5 November 1800: 339-340).

[161] See Verhoeven's "This Blissful Period" for a discussion of Condorcet's thought and its influence or at least reflection in Brown's thought.

[162] See Dillon's "Highest Province of Benevolence."

[163] Smith composed a prefatory poem for his first American edition of Erasmus Darwin's scientific poem *The Botanic Garden* (1798), recounting the history of writing up through the invention of the printing press and moveable type and offering a utopic vision of the ensuing brotherhood of "knowledge and of right." The following two passages convey Smith's faith in the future hegemony of right reason:

> Hence, wide diffused, increasing knowledge flies,
> And error's shades forsake the jaundiced eyes;
> Man knows himself for man, and sees, elate,
> The kinder promise of his future fate;
> Nations, ashamed, their ancient hate forego,
> And find a brother, where they found a foe.
> . . . . . .
> Thus shall the years proceed, --till growing time
> Unfold the treasure of each differing clime;
> Till one vast brotherhood mankind unite

In equal bands of knowledge and of right:
Then, the proud column, to the smiling skies,
In simple majesty sublime shall rise,
O'er Ignorance foil'd, their triumph loud proclaim,
And bear inscribed, immortal, Darwin's name.
("Epistle to the Author of the Botanic Garden")

[164] See this passage in *Political Justice* II. ii 53-54.

[165] See Krause's "Ormond: Seduction in a New Key."

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